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Playing With Text: Textual Dramaturgies in Contemporary Australian Theatre

Mark Rogers
University of Wollongong

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Playing With Text: Textual Dramaturgies in Contemporary Australian Theatre

Mark Rogers
3283938

This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the conferral of the degree:

Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisors:
Margaret Hamilton
Tim Maddock

The University of Wollongong

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Abstract

Playing With Text examines the distinct approaches to text characterising the contemporary Australian theatre landscape through an analysis of *The Sovereign Wife* (2013) by Sisters Grimm, *Moving Target* (2008), directed by Benedict Andrews, and *M + M* (2013) by the Daniel Schlusser Ensemble. Each of these examples constitute a different engagement with text; from pre-written drafts for performance to text developed through rehearsal and theatrical responses to text emerging from alternative mediums - specifically the novel. In addition, the thesis presents an exegetical account of the practical theatre project *Tom William Mitchell*, first produced at the University of Wollongong in July 2017 and includes the text of this work and a DVD recording of the production. *Tom William Mitchell* explores the practical application of dramaturgical concepts outlined in the thesis and, in doing so, attests to how they employ text in intermedial modes of performance. In this way, *Playing With Text* seeks to contribute to the conceptualisation of recent textual dramaturgies by demonstrating that the term text-based theatre fails to account for the specific encounters with text created by a number of artists through dramaturgical approaches that foreground theatre as a site of medial transmission.

By pointing to the limitations emerging from the broad application of the term text-based theatre, the thesis addresses recent aesthetic developments that have emerged over the past decade in Australian theatre. As the majority of the artists studied in this thesis are yet to receive major scholarly attention for their compositional approach to text, this thesis addresses the critical question of their treatment of textual material as a fundamental aspect of theatrical medial transmission and frames the distinctive affect this has on spectatorship. It applies Peter M Boenisch's (2013) notion of 'reflexive dramaturgy' in order to theorise the relationship between simultaneous fictive and non-fictive modes of performance to outline this affect. Slavoj Žižek's conception of a parallax view is employed to consider the simultaneity of this mode of spectatorship, and detail the ways in which these productions foreground the *processes of mediation* inherent to the use of text in the theatre medium. Further, the thesis positions recent shifts in the theorisation and practice of what it identifies as textual dramaturgy through an analysis of the changing approaches to dramatic theatre and theatrical authorship presented by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006, 2016) and Duška Radosavljević (2013). Finally, the thesis presents an application of these concepts through *Tom William Mitchell*, a project that provides a practical perspective on the implementation of these dramaturgical approaches to text in development, rehearsal and performance.

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To my supervisors, Tim Maddock and Margaret Hamilton. This simply would not have been possible without you. Tim, your keen insight and searching questions pushed my practical project into new territory and I greatly benefitted from your support during that process. Margaret, your extraordinary grasp of the field and demand for greater specificity and clarity in my approach carved something cogent out of my half-formed thoughts about Australian theatre. I am deeply grateful for the time and energy you both spent working me through this process.

There were also many performers and collaborators who worked on *Tom William Mitchell* throughout its long development process. Those who helped form the early drafts – Sarah Meacham, Gretchen Habberman, Steve-Wilson Alexander, Ryan McGoldrick, Lily Calderbank and Jackson Davis – through to those who performed in and worked on the eventual production: Hannah Goodwin, Lily Hensby, James Harding, Matt Abotomey, Solomon Thomas, Braydon May, Lauren Scott-Young, Harry McGee, Carly Young, Liam Halliwell, Frankie Clarke and Tyler Fitzpatrick. The individual brilliance of these young makers is matched only by the genius of their dramaturgical contributions to the work. *Tom William Mitchell* would have paled without them.

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Finally, I must acknowledge the artists themselves, the people whose work so enthralled me that I have spent nearly four years thinking about it. Their playful and inventive approach to form and text is both artistically inspiring and academically fascinating. I am endlessly grateful that theatre like this exists in Australia and I hope that, in some small way, this thesis contributes to highlighting the importance of such practices.

To all of you – thanks heaps.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Since their first show, Corvus, a poetic play by Jasmine Chan, The Rabble have been deeply concerned with language, although they are often regarded as artists working at the opposite end of the spectrum of “text-based theatre”. This is, when you think about it, quite odd, and reflects how narrowly text is defined in theatre culture. (Croggon 2013a)

This provocation by Australian theatre critic Alison Croggon was put forward in her response to Melbourne independent theatre company The Rabble’s work *Room of Regret*. She identifies the work, an immersive and highly visual adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*, as “theatre structured by language” (Croggon 2013a). This observation is highly significant in an Australian context, especially given other responses to The Rabble’s work which describe it as “performance art at its most entitled and obnoxious” (Bache 2013) or as “wacky... devised theatre” (Woodhead 2013). More often their work is referred to as ‘contemporary performance’ or simply ‘performance’, terms in an Australian context that find parallels with ‘live art’ in England or ‘performance art’ in the United States of America. Croggon’s assertion provides a reading that is atypical for this company, as it identifies the importance of the text to a practice that is most often identified by critics as postdramatic theatre. The disparity of responses to this particular work also showcases a broader issue in the changing Australian theatre landscape; there is a dissensus in the language used to describe the shifting genres of theatre form, both in the media that covers this work, and in scholarly material responding to it. If, as Croggon argues, *Room of Regret*, a work by a company more often described as making visual theatre, is “theatre structured by language”, then what is text-based theatre? How are Australian artists re-defining approaches to working with text by departing from historical models of practice that, first and foremost, seek to illustrate a (literary) text?

Text-based theatre is a term widely used by artists, critics and scholars to describe theatre works. It is still used regularly by major theatre bodies in Australia as a way of defining what they do (or do not) produce as a company.¹ It is surprising then, that this commonly used term is rarely defined. The term often implies a binary, an either/or structure for the use of text in theatre: text-based or non-text-based. In isolation, these terms refer only to the presence or absence of text as a source material in the process of making theatre, and do not specify the particular treatment or approach to that text or strategies used to create without such material. Croggon's review highlights that the term exists largely as a floating signifier, a term without a solid point of reference. As such, her appeal against our theatre culture's 'narrowly defined' understanding of text-based theatre provides a starting point for this research and its focus on recent examples of Australian theatre by Sisters Grimm, Daniel Schlusser Ensemble and Benedict Andrews, all of whom use text (in various forms) as a central aspect of the dramaturgy of their productions. For this thesis, calling these theatre works simply text-based or non-text-based is reductive, as it precludes an analysis of the specific dramaturgies employed by each production. As such, this thesis argues that the term text-based theatre does not account for the manifold approaches to text by Australian artists and their interest in creating specific encounters with textual material by foregrounding theatre as a reflexive site of medial transmission. In doing so, the thesis seeks to contribute to the conceptualisation of textual dramaturgies in contemporary Australian theatre and thereby extend the criteria employed to assess the use of text in formally diverse and contrasting theatre works.

The word 'text' itself is a complex term subject to different conceptualisations in different disciplines². As used by researchers in theatre studies, the term might

¹ See the websites of Critical Stages, Create NSW, ReAction Theatre and Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney for reference to 'text-based theatre'. See also Metro Arts, Playwriting Australia's Business Plan 2014, and

² The etymology of the English noun 'text' is the Latin verb 'texere', to weave or wreathe (Weekley 2012), a root to which MTC's Literary Manager Chris Mead made reference in a recorded conversation with British playwright Simon Stephens in the Lawler Theatre in 2015. This conception, while then made in reference to a playwright's responsibilities

refer to the “dramatic text” (Pavis 2016, p. 49) or, in a semiotic sense, to the meaning able to be read into the staging and *mise-en-scène*. Keir Elam defines the difference here as between “that produced *in* the theatre and that composed *for* the theatre” (2002, p. 3), or the *performance text* and the *dramatic text* respectively. Erika Fischer-Lichte highlights the duality of this split notion of text in performance, where the spectator is aware of the phenomenal body of the actor as well as their semiotic body, where the actor and their movements constitute a ‘text’ or sign. Lehmann echoes this, referring to early *ur-dramatic* work, whose ritualised use of costume, role-play and props “represent(s) a kind of ‘text’ before the advent of writing” (2006, p. 46). It is clear, however, in Lehmann’s recent seminal contributions to the field (2006, 2016) that ‘text’ largely refers to the dramatic, literary text. This allows him to articulate the “historical drifting apart of text and theatre” (2006, p. 46), tracing what he calls the crisis of drama from 1880 onwards. He specifies his use of the term drama, referring to it as a literary genre defined by transformation. For this thesis - wherein the focus is on precisely this transformative medial quality of drama - text refers to the *pre-existing written document that the artists respond to through performance*. I have avoided using the term *dramatic text*, as in some of the examples studied the text being responded to is in fact a novel or film, forms of text outside of the genre of drama. Pavis notes this development when he states that “what was considered dramatic up until the twentieth century - dialogue, conflict, dramatic situation, character - is no longer an essential condition for a text that is to be staged” (1998, p. 120), even playfully referring to staging the telephone book as the “ultimate consequence” of this shift. To account for this, my use of the term text refers more to the *written media* used by theatre-makers in their work – telephone book or play text as it may be. This focus on the dramaturgy of the use of text(s) in theatre is intended to provide a more specific approach to what has been broadly referred to as text-based theatre in Australian practice.

as a ‘wrighter’ of events and behaviour (as opposed to a ‘writer’ of linguistics), opens up consideration not just of text’s place as it is interwoven into theatre and how texts themselves provide shape to be woven in specific ways, but also of the playwright’s musical and structural sensibilities in the rehearsal room – a concept dealt with in more detail in Chapter Three.

The perception of the inadequacies of the term text-based theatre to describe contemporary practices is by no means a new phenomenon. They have been raised by Gay McAuley more than twenty years ago, who writes on “the perceived opposition between theatre and performance, the high culture/popular culture debate, and the on-going critique of text-based theatre” (1996, p. 140). In this short work, she defends against the attitude that studying theatre is “studying a dodo” (1996, p. 140), arguing for a renewed investment in researching the function of text-based theatre of the Western tradition, beyond simply using it to refer to the opposing form of non-text-based theatre. While McAuley does not provide a definition of text-based theatre, it is clear that she considers text-based work in relation to a form of literary theatre, or what Alison Oddey describes as “the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of a playwright and director” (1996, p. 4). Unlike Oddey, however, whose book *Devising Theatre* dismisses text-based theatre as overly prescriptive next to the “infinite number of possibilities” (1996, p. 4) in devised work, McAuley argues for a re-investment in the analysis of theatre form. She states, “we have to invent different kinds of critical, analytical and theoretical approaches to the phenomenon” (1996, p. 144). Croggon’s comment opening this thesis points to the implications of Oddey’s conception and the ongoing critical misconception that opposes text-based playwright/director processes to collaborative, devised works. This thesis aims to move beyond this binary and demonstrate specific strategies relating to text as it is used in examples of contemporary practice, linking theoretical and practical research strands to conceptualise textual dramaturgies in an Australian context.

In thinking through a working definition for what is often called text-based theatre, it is important to define what has culturally been considered constitutive of Australian theatre practice. This development is usually traced in relation to what is referred to as the New Wave of Australian playwrights produced in the

1970s³, although John McCallum begins with the playwright Louis Esson as a precursor to this. The development of Australia's national drama is drawn from a historical point, the emergence of playwrights such as David Williamson, Alma De Groen and Alex Buzo, and their support through Nimrod and Australian Performing Group. Julian Meyrick, in his 2005 Platform Paper, points to the way in which:

there has been, and for some time, [the] assumption, that Australia succeeded in outlining the major contours of its theatrical persona at some definitive moment in time (the Whitlam years, say) and no further efforts, intellectually or practically, have been necessary. (Meyrick 2005, p. 7)

Jana Perkovic, a critic and dramaturg, also states that "Australian theatre is Western theatre and the dramatic text at its heart is a highly specific form, a product of socio-historical forces" (2014), highlighting the way in which plays form the dominant discourse around what is considered text-based theatre in Australia. Chris Mead, the current Literary Director of Melbourne Theatre Company, and former artistic director of Australia's playwrighting support body, PlayWriting Australia, has indicated that this embedded cultural understanding of what makes an 'Australian' play has led to the exclusion of ethnically diverse voices:

There is no such thing as an Australian play. It once may have been the case that, in an effort to define a tacitly agreed representation of Australia, either our accent, or else the bush, or drovers, something descriptive of this physical continent was needed to assert our independence of a once overwhelming cultural inheritance. (Mead 2008, p. 53)

He highlights that what has been identified as text-based theatre in an Australian context is not only narrowly defined in a formal sense, but also does not reflect

³ See Meyrick (2002) for a detailed exploration of this historical development in Australian theatre.

thematic or cultural diversity. Mead emphasises that “few text-based theatre companies dedicate time or expertise to responding to the diversity or complexity of contemporary Australian culture” (2008, p. 40). The narrowness of Australian text-based theatre to which Crogon refers is here revealed as operating on more levels than one.

This thesis responds to the embedded cultural understanding of the features of Australian text-based theatre by employing an alternative terminology that provides more specific reference to the dramaturgical intent behind the use of text in theatre, its function in relation to spectatorship and the politics of the artists studied. By conceptualising textual dramaturgy in this way, this thesis moves beyond an understanding of text as what Oddey terms “literary theatre” (1996, p. 4), or an equivalent found in Patrice Pavis’s term “textocentric” (2003, p. 203). For Pavis, in a “textocentric” approach to theatre:

The text is conceived as a reserve, even as the depository of meaning; and the task of performance is to extract and express this meaning, just as one extracts (scenic) juice from a (textual) carrot. (Pavis 2003, p. 204)

This provides a clearer definition of the motivating process behind works that utilise text, that the production’s approach (juice) stems from the text (carrot). However, Lehmann’s (2006) term ‘dramatic theatre’ further accounts for not only the motivating processes behind the use of text in this form, but also the teleological hierarchy of elements within theatrical production. For Lehmann, dramatic theatre is a form that is “subordinated to the primacy of the text” (2006, p. 21). Lehmann’s understanding of the practices and techniques historically understood as dramatic theatre provides this thesis with a more precise way of outlining recent dramaturgies’ development beyond these modes of producing text. What he describes as the subordination of dramatic theatre to the text, wherein productions primarily serve to *illustrate* a written text, does not accord with the processes of the artists studied in this thesis – Sisters Grimm’s works, for example, develop maximalist, clichéd, genre-based texts specifically so that their productions can fail at producing them. Green and

Flanders describe their interest in “making plays that essentially fail - trying to re-create impossibly huge visions with stupidly inadequate resources” (STC 2013). The other artists this thesis focuses on similarly defy categorisation as dramatic theatre, although they all individually retain the use of text as an essential mode of their dramaturgy. To borrow Pavis’ metaphor, these are processes wherein the (textual) carrot is being cut up rather than juiced, or where the carrot is being dressed up and pilloried by the juicers, or where the carrot is grown throughout the process of performance in order to be juiced in a specific way. How, then, are Australian artists conceiving and using the text in these processes and how can we develop language to understand and describe these new dramaturgies?

My thesis sets out to address this question by reading recent Australian productions as examples of theatre that suggest a complex meeting-point between drama’s creation of a fictive cosmos, and postdramatic theatrical devices that serve to undercut and expose this creation. Lehmann’s conception of dramatic theatre and postdramatic theatre as a *continuum* wherein postdramatic theatre “should be understood as the unfolding and blossoming of a potential for disintegration, dismantling and deconstruction within the drama itself” (2006, p. 44) prompts analysis of the reflexive and playful strategies evident in work by specific contemporary Australian theatre practitioners who are repurposing text in performance. Lehmann’s term has been subject to many misconceptions and misuses since its translation into English.⁴ For many, it provided a way of articulating a dichotomous, oppositional thinking surrounding text-based theatre, reducing the term postdramatic to mean “theatre without text” (Varney 2007). Despite this, a close reading of Lehmann provides conceptual tools for thinking through the precise functioning of new theatre ‘texts’, the shifting relation of semiotic signs within theatre production. Hamilton refers to the way in which the term “arguably circumvents the performance/theatre dichotomy”

⁴ Denise Varney, for example, describes Lehmann’s work as a “revisiting of postmodern theatre, replacing the operative term postmodern with postdramatic” (2007), an oversimplification which misses the precise function of Lehmann’s term as it applies to theatre.

(2008, p. 52) and central to this is the notion that, for Lehmann, the term postdramatic does not infer the absence or denigration of text, but rather describes a set of strategies in performance that develop in relation to the form of dramatic theatre. These strategies position dramatic theatre “as an expectation of large parts of its audience” (2006, p. 27), and play with shifting the dramaturgical logic underpinning the work away from the hierarchical privileging of text. This ‘expectation’ is central to this thesis’s understanding of the ways in which the chosen case studies play with text, although, unlike the postdramatic work that Lehmann describes as “a renunciation of the traditions of dramatic form” (2006, p. 26), in recent Australian works there is a renewed exploration of those traditions. By building on strategies that have been traditionally read as dramatic, these artists play with ‘expectation’ in order to re-invest in the possibilities of text in the theatre medium. For Lehmann, the directorial and dramaturgical strategies that respond to these traditional structures and expectations are “not motivated simply by contempt for the text but also by the attempt of *rescue*” (2006, p. 52). In her review of Lehmann’s monograph, Varney connects this notion to Peter Brook’s conception of deadly theatre, describing the way postdramatic theatre can ‘revivify’ dramatic text in “striking productions” (2007). For Boenisch, however, *rescue* extends further. Rather than simply being about making well-worn texts spectacular, new theatre forms are rescuing “from the threat of reification of theatre and cultural legacy as a cultural commodity, which safely absorbs and contains the radical energies that had driven the playwrights to write their drama in the first place” (2017, p. 11). Boenisch even describes the way in which the director of classical drama can be conceptualised as the “playwright’s radical servant” (2015, p. 73) by re-imagining and bringing the text to a contemporary audience.

Boenisch’s conceptualisation can be applied to elaborate on the radical and subversive potential evident in the work of artists explored in this thesis. Viewing the productions in this way opens up conceptions of theatre wherein the use of text is radically shifted from the simply literary, and yet is still employed as a principal aspect of its dramaturgy. This allows this thesis to articulate the motivations for this approach to text that departs from strategies traditionally

read as either dramatic and postdramatic. It is important to note that I do not intend to use dramatic theatre and postdramatic theatre as 'catch all' terms to describe the performances, but instead aim to highlight how different dramaturgical strategies, historically read as dramatic or postdramatic, are becoming playfully integrated and interwoven in examples of Australian work. Above all, I aim to dispel the neat, binary thinking that places examples of practice definitively in either category, and instead focus on reading these modes of dramaturgy in relation to text, collaboration, intermediality and spectatorship. By examining the camp criticism of Australian values in Sisters Grimm's *The Sovereign Wife*⁵, the alternative notion of 'fidelity' to text in Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's *M+M*⁶, and the game structures and collaboration in Marius von Mayenburg and Benedict Andrews' *Moving Target*⁷, this study seeks to contribute to the re-conceptualisation of works that stage, adapt, respond to, devise from and repurpose texts, and, in doing so, significantly extend understanding of the function of text in contemporary Australian work beyond text-based theatre. It identifies the defining characteristic of the dramaturgies of text deployed by Sisters Grimm and others as the interplay between devices historically read as dramatic or postdramatic, which creates a reflexive and playful foregrounding of the medial processes inherent to theatrical representation.

M+M and *The Sovereign Wife* are both works made by independent companies based in Melbourne in 2013. *Moving Target* is an earlier example of textual dramaturgy that utilises similar strategies, and develops from collaboration between an Australian director and a German playwright, working with a group of Australian actors⁸. This work was presented in a more resourced, main-stage

⁵ Performed 11th-21st July 2013, Lawler Theatre, Southbank, Melbourne as a part of MTC's Neon Festival of Independent Theatre.

⁶ Performed 11th-16th October 2013, Theatre Works, Ackland Road, St Kilda as a part of Melbourne Festival.

⁷ Performed 12th-29th March 2008, Beckett Theatre, Malthouse and 2nd-13th April, Sydney Opera House.

⁸ The extent to which this production is 'Australian' given the international nature of the collaboration will be considered in Chapter 3.

context⁹, with showings at major festivals and Australian main-stage theatres in 2008. Each work is radically different in form and in its approach to its textual source material, and yet the dramaturgical processes this thesis identifies as functioning in the works are very similar. Critical responses to these works also echo responses to *The Rabble's Room of Regret* quoted above. They hinge on the binary perception of the works' relation to the text, either describing them as not really relating to the originating text (as in *M+M*), focusing on the text rather than on the production (as in *The Sovereign Wife*), or characterising the work as a production not living up to the text (as in *Moving Target*). The similarities between the works thus extends to the way in which they have been maligned critically. This thesis seeks to address the questions of the criteria used to assess these works by identifying parallels in the strategies each work uses. It seeks to demonstrate their use of text as one that uses both dramatic devices (a representation of a fictive cosmos) and postdramatic devices (an exposition of the aesthetics of representation) to highlight the processes intrinsic to the use of text in performance- the *medial* processes that stage text in the theatre medium.

Intermediality and Text

Lehmann identifies “the reduced (or, at any rate, fundamentally changed) literary aspect of theatre” (2016, p. 8). A logocentric, text-based analysis of theatre practice ignores this momentous shift. As such, referring to theatre as text-based does not take into account the diversity and nuances in practice that have taken place – the fundamentally changed nature of text as a literary form. According to Lehmann, a literary approach also side-steps a fundamental understanding of theatre analysis from its beginnings with Aristotle. Lehmann points to Aristotle's consideration of the text as being a part of the *Melopoeia*, the sung aspect of tragedy, stating that “text in the theatre has always been considered in its dimension as sound, music and voice” (1997, p. 55). Text, then, has always already been intrinsically linked to the theatre situation, and analysis that ignores this dimension disavows this fundamental reality. Instead of looking

⁹ As a work presented by Adelaide Festival, Malthouse Theatre and the Sydney Opera House.

only at how the qualities of a text are *realised* in the theatre, as in a dramatic paradigm, or examining how the text and performance are *no longer dramatic*, as in a postdramatic paradigm, this thesis focuses on how the theatre medium's inherent reflexive processes *mediate* text in different ways. By starting with Lehmann, this thesis moves towards a consideration of theatre as a medium in and of itself. Boenisch has drawn attention precisely to the way theatre functions as a 'medium' in his analyses of contemporary theatre practice and, in doing so, has shifted the terms of debate to the means of theatrical communication. By re-orienting the term intermediality in relation to theatre practice - that is, moving it away from its connection to the advances of digital technology and the inclusion of electronic media in performance - Boenisch articulates an alternative approach to theatre's mediality:

Theatre itself is a media technology that utilizes, at its very heart, other media to transmit and store, while it highlights, at the same time, the process of processing information. Essentially, theatre is a semiotic practice, which incorporates, spatializes and disseminates in sensorial terms (thus: performs) the contents and cognitive strategies of other media by creating multiple channels, and a multi-media semiotic and sensoric environment. (Boenisch 2006, p. 113)

In this sense, theatre is a medium that mediates the text in the moment of performance. Text in theatre is, in this way, *media being mediated*. Boenisch's contribution moves the focus of the term from performances that incorporate other digital forms of media, to emphasise the inherent processes of mediation that theatre has always engendered. Boenisch states that "rather than having become 'intermedial' only lately, theatre in fact has been a genuine intermedial form of art from the very start" (Boenisch 2003b, p. 35). In this way, even the most conventional piece of theatre can be termed intermedial, in that it stages one medium (text) in another (theatre). This observation is suggestive of the possibilities an awareness of this mediality can open up in performance in multiple modes. For Boenisch, however, this statement serves to analyse the strategies of a (digital) intermedial work by Japanese group NEST. What I

highlight in my analyses and case studies, however, extends this idea to include the ways in which the artists *foreground* the processes of mediation in their works even without the inclusion of digital media - the ways they *play with* text and theatre as separate mediums. The particularities of how the relationship between the two mediums plays out are particular to each work studied, but nevertheless share a common thread in their dramaturgy – the foregrounding of these medial processes.

To begin from the notion of the “fundamentally changed literary aspect of theatre” that Lehmann identifies, not only does looking at specific examples of work as ‘text-based’ or ‘non text-based’ theatre not adequately account for recent theoretical developments, it sidesteps the ways in which theatre has been, *a priori*, a site of medial transmission. This distinction is essential when examining current practices in Australia, not only because the breakdown and crossover of genres in these works render any attempt at a singular definition of either/or obsolete, but also because it misses the precise “changed literary aspect” in contemporary theatre. Thinking of theatre as a textual genre already sets up an impasse, in that it maintains a logocentric hierarchy of the written word, ignoring the full dimensions of the theatre event that necessarily includes the spectators and stage. One must note, however, that current practices do not eradicate text in favour of the performance situation; in fact, the opposite is true. These works foreground and highlight the text *as a way of drawing attention* to the performance situation. The fact that these artists are foregrounding these processes in this way demands an analytical approach that accounts for this interaction. This dramaturgical mode is, of course, quite different to how Aristotle thinks of the function of the medium. Philosopher and theorist, Samuel Weber, notes the historical importance of the medium’s *transparency*, as conceptualised by the foundational theatre theorist:

Applied to theater [sic], or, as Aristotle conceives it, to drama, the scenic medium allows mimesis quite literally to *take place*, but only to the extent that it fades into pure transparency. In tragedy it is the plot, *the muthos*,

that transforms theatrical *opsis* into meaningful *synopsis*. The scenic medium thus becomes the transparent space that allows the plot to emerge. (Weber 2004, p. 101)

Transparency is a significant term for the phenomenon Weber describes. The choice of the word *transparent*, over one such as *invisible*, indicates that even if the aim of the theatre medium is 'pure' transmission of the plot, a trace of the medium must necessarily remain. One *sees through* something that is transparent, such as a window, but one is nevertheless always aware of its presence. It is this particular 'present' quality of the transparent medium that these artists are playing with. By using the medium in a way that signals itself as transparent, they are reflexively telling the spectator, *this is a window, remember that this is a window*.

The Fictive Cosmos

A clear example of how this notion of transparency functions can be found by focusing on how the works this thesis studies play with what Lehmann terms a "closed fictive cosmos" (2006, p. 99). This is, for Lehmann, a term that refers to a concrete part of dramatic theatre, and references a mimetic world wherein actions happen for the audience to read in relation to the presupposition of a stage reality. His term builds on Aristotle's formula of *mimesis praxeos*, an imitation of an action, as being the foundational point of drama. A closed fictive cosmos is, therefore, one of the core strategies of dramatic theatre. For Lehmann:

[D]ramatic theatre was the formation of illusion. It wanted to construct a *fictive cosmos* and let all the stage represent – be – a world ... intended for the imagination and empathy of the spectator to follow and complete the *illusion*. (Lehmann 2006, p. 22)

In contrast to this, Lehmann proposes that the performance works of the late twentieth century dissolve this formula and instead stage works that, using a

variety of techniques, create theatre without a fictive cosmos, highlighting instead the importance of performative presence. While Lehmann terms these works postdramatic theatre, it is again worth stressing that he does not claim that these works exist entirely without 'drama' – instead specifying that these works exist in historical relation to dramatic form. Lehmann even acknowledges that:

[N]arrative fragmentation, heterogeneity of style, hypernaturalist, grotesque and neo-expressionist elements, which are all typical of postdramatic theatre, can also be found in productions which nevertheless belong to the model of dramatic theatre. (Lehmann 2006, p. 24)

This is the “unfolding and blossoming of a potential” (Lehmann 2006, p. 44) within the dramatic form itself, inasmuch as these works respond to the dramatic form’s necessity for totality and wholeness with only “the limbs or branches of a dramatic organism” which for these works “are still present and form the space of a memory that is ‘bursting open’” (2006, p. 27). In specific examples of Australian theatre, however, the expectations of the audience are not primarily shifted by a re-definition of the form of the written text - as in, for example, the work of Sarah Kane or Heiner Müller - but through a highlighting of the relationship between the fictive cosmos and the exposition of techniques used to create it. For example, my practical work *Tom William Mitchell* uses titling to define the locations in the fictive world of the text. Each scene is preceded by text on a screen following the form of a screenplay logline - INT. TOM AND AIDIE’S APARTMENT, NIGHT, for example. This locates the action, while also signaling the constructed nature of itself as a title; as such, the very technique that creates a sense of the fictive cosmos is also a strategy to dissolve it. Strategies relating to the dissolution of the dramatic fictive cosmos in postdramatic work are here re-invigorated and foregrounded as a way of simultaneously expressing the fictive cosmos. As the following Chapters demonstrate, works by Sisters Grimm, Benedict Andrews and Daniel Schlusser Ensemble do create a fictive cosmos, but in doing so, signal and foreground the

processes of its creation through aesthetic and formal devices more commonly understood as being present in postdramatic theatre. As such the notion of the expectation of drama that postdramatic theatre challenged to create an altered mode of spectatorship is being re-doubled, and it is through postdramatic techniques that the audience experience of the fictive cosmos is being foregrounded. The key difference here is that, rather than existing merely as a 'withered' memory, the dramatic form is highlighted *as a way of* achieving a similar shift in spectator perception. These dramaturgies develop their own theatrical language to articulate their particular interests and thematic concerns, they once again return to the text, but instead of solely trying to illustrate the fictive cosmos, they use elements typically attributed to postdramatic theatre to expose and critique the use of text *while using it*.

Lehmann identifies a significant point in relation to these developments in his study of the "new textuality" of the theatre. He notes that "while the dialogue on the stage is fading, dialogue returns with a new emphasis between stage and audience" (1997, p. 58). In recent textual dramaturgy in Australia, however, there has been another development. Far from fading away, it is precisely the text and intra-scenic dialogue that are being used to emphasise the exchange between audience and stage. Further, the fictive construct of theatre is also being used to point to its own processes and facilitate this dialogue. Lehmann also argues that, "if theatre used to be defined as a kind of fictive cosmos presented to a public by means of theatre signs, theatre now tends more and more to be defined as a special and unique situation" (1997, p. 58). In the textual dramaturgy of the works this thesis studies, however, it is the play with simultaneous fictive and non-fictive modes of presentation themselves that defines the 'unique situation' of performance.

The postdramatic field is broad and multifaceted, incorporating many modes of making theatre, including work made outside of the hierarchical producing structures of commercial theatre, devised by collectives and groups instead of directors and actors - and also works by Robert Wilson and Frank Carstorf, two artists working in the festival circuit and subsidised theatre respectively. In

Australia, this performative turn has been documented in Margaret Hamilton's *Transfigured Stages: Major Practitioners and Theatre Aesthetics in Australia* (2011), which provides a detailed analysis of practitioners from the 1980s to late 1990s. Kerrie Schaefer's studies of Sydney performance (1998, 2008, 2010) and Peta Tait's volume *Body Show/s: Australia viewings of live performance* (2000) are also engaged in examining works of circus, postdramatic theatre, durational work and performance art. These works centre on Sydney's Performance Space, PACT centre for emerging artists, Melbourne's Arts House and Brisbane's Metro Arts. However, while it is true that the artists this thesis studies produce work that, in some ways, reproduces aesthetic and formal features of these modes of performance, their work has not been produced in these contexts, nor does it develop from the same historical lineage. Their use of postdramatic elements in performance sits alongside their experimentation with the possibilities of text in the theatre medium and stems from a deep interest in and understanding of the theatre form, both its dramatic history and the development of postdramatic work.

The motivations behind this shift in approach to text by these artists are multifaceted. One linking artistic factor, however, is their attitudes to the predominance of dramatic, representational forms on Australian stages¹⁰. Each of these artists has their own "antagonistic relationship" (Greene in Blake 2014) to the context they make work in. I have already pointed out the ways in which the work of these artists has been critically maligned in key print media, but their work has also been accused more broadly of introducing a culture that seeks to denigrate and devalue text. Andrews has been accused of promoting "director's theatre at its worst" (Craven 2009) and even of "establishing his authority over the writer" (Nowra 2001). Schlusser too has been accused of making "the sort of thing that gives postdramatic theatre a bad name" (Woodhead 2013). Sisters Grimm themselves enjoy playfully repeating an early one-star review of their work in Edinburgh: "You will soon loathe them – and their SHRIEKING – with every fibre of your being" (The Scotsman 2008). The

¹⁰ For detailed accounts of the development of Australia's development of dramatic writing on our stages see: J McCallum (2009); Meyrick (2001); Fotheringham and Smith (2013); Brisbane (2005); Wolf (2008); Radic (2006); Varney (2011).

artists themselves, however, consider their approach to the text in markedly different terms. It is essential to note that these artists' treatment of text and dramatic material is, far from denigrating or devaluing it, more akin to the "attempt of rescue" that Lehmann suggests motivated practitioners of postdramatic work. Andrews states: "I am not interested in museum theatre or a received notion of approaching a given writer ... [A]s director I strive to discover the text for the first time" (Andrews 2001). Schlusser argues for an understanding of "fidelity" to the author that demands a "realism" that connects the work to the contemporary moment (Schlusser in Andrew 2011). Sisters Grimm ironically self-describe themselves as "two trash-talking homos on a kamikaze mission to take out Australian theatre" (Woodhead 2007). It is clear, however, that their motivations are also embedded in the goal of re-invigorating the form:

We don't make beautifully crafted pieces of theatre. The shows are falling apart at the seams and really rowdy and ragged. We try to make them accessible to everyone; not just the regular theatre crowd. We want our plays to be to mainstream theatre what punk is to classical music. We want people to have a rowdy night in a theatre space. (Greene in Rowe, 2011)

These dramaturgies develop their own theatrical language to articulate their particular interests and thematic concerns; they once again return to the text, but instead of solely trying to illustrate the fictive cosmos, they use elements typically attributed to postdramatic theatre to expose and critique the use of text *while using it*. This thesis argues that it is not a postdramatic impulse that drives these artists to dissolve elements of a fictive cosmos, but rather an interest in the *reflexive* possibilities of text in the theatre situation.

The Parallax Perspective, Reflexive Dramaturgy and 'Play'

A significant concept throughout this research is related to the idea of

simultaneity. In this research, however, this concept does not so much refer only to the dramatic technique of overloading sign systems, or the proliferation of multiple digital images. Rather, it refers to a *process* at work within recent Australian textual dramaturgies, aimed not at producing overload in the spectator per se, but instead at creating reflexivity between the text and performance. This manifests most clearly in the simultaneous investment in creating a fictive cosmos and showcasing the techniques used to achieve it. The process this engenders with the spectators can be understood through the notion of simultaneity and is key to understanding how these new dramaturgies function. It is also a key tenet in the thinking of Slovenian philosopher and social critic Slavoj Žižek, whose vast and wide-ranging body of work furthers the conceptualisation of how these dramaturgical strategies function in performance. Despite rarely considering theatre directly, Žižek's work has been applied to the analysis of contemporary theatre by a number of scholars, and most notably Boenisch (2010, 2014a, 2015). Furthermore, the book *Žižek and Performance* (Chow and Mangold 2014), which includes a short consideration of theatre by Žižek himself, advances understanding of how his development of Hegelian and Lacanian concepts can be applied to theatre. The Žižekian model that provides a way of reading the simultaneous use of a fictive cosmos and devices that traditionally signal its negation is that of the parallax: a "constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible" (2006, p. 4). Žižek uses the metaphor of a Mobius strip to describe this, a surface which appears to have two sides, but when you traverse it, actually only consists of one. For Žižek, a parallax is not simply two incompatible perspectives; it is the object and its perspective double that is "always-already" included in the object itself (2006, p. 17). This is a change in the way an object (idea, discourse, artwork) is perceived, but not in the object itself, which already includes this alternate aspect of itself. The two perceivable sides of the Mobius strip are always still contained within the one side. This notion, when applied to theatre, complicates and extends Lehmann's reference to the illustrative, illusory quality of dramatic theatre. Creating a parallax perspective on dramatic theatre allows for the perception of the simultaneous fictive and non-fictive aspects inherent to the presentation of text in the theatre medium. In

specific examples of Australian work, this inherent parallax mediation between text and its production onstage is being foregrounded, highlighting the “constantly shifting perspective between two points”, the fictive and the non-fictive.

Boenisch’s application of Žižek, in this context, develops a concrete framework for analysing performances that play with the borderline between fictive and non-fictive closure. Boenisch’s concept of “reflexive dramaturgies” is indebted to the concept of a parallax perspective. He identifies, in reference to works from continental Europe,

... reflexive dramaturgies [that] no longer only avoid the closure of the fictional world, as was characteristic for post-dramatic theatre, but prevent the closure of the spectators’ perception as well. They refuse to establish a clear spectatorial position opposite the performance, by maintaining the parallax perspective. (Boenisch 2010, p. 171)

Boenisch’s term reflexive dramaturgy cannot be wholly adopted to describe Australian textual work, which has particular qualities and nuances not shared by the European directors and companies on which Boenisch focuses¹¹ - the historical and cultural differences in practice as well as the sheer difference of resources available to the artists in mounting the works, for example. Despite this, his term reflexive dramaturgy is still useful in conceptualising the processes at work in new Australian dramaturgies, as it defines not only theatre’s complex relationship with fictive modes, but also how this affects spectatorship.

In the Cambridge English Dictionary ‘reflexive’ is defined as a word used in grammar to denote a subject referring back to itself; in the sentence *I performed myself*, the word *performed* is a reflexive verb, and the pronoun *myself* is also reflexive. In mathematics a reflexive relation is a descriptor for the connection of

¹¹ Boenisch has written extensively on the work of Thomas Ostermeier (2016, 2014) as well as examining specific works by Ivo Van Hove, Frank Carstorf, Katie Mitchell, tg STAN and Guy Cassiers.

numbers in a binary set where each element relates to itself; that is, the relation of saying *is equal to* denotes a reflexive relation. It also has another meaning relating to a reflex action. For example, at the end of a theatre performance, many would begin to clap reflexively without thinking or out of habit. In arts criticism, the term is usually used in relation to a self-conscious awareness, often of genre form, that plays out in ironic ways: the film *Scream* (1996) is an example of a horror film within which the tropes of the horror film genre are openly discussed as they occur. If it refers to itself and its own processes, then one can say it is reflexive. Pavis describes this feature in theatre as the effect of *mise en abyme*, the “structural and thematic doubling” (1998, p. 215) of the larger frame of performance within the performance itself. He refers to the *play-within-a-play* as the most common form of this doubling, but this also may extend to include reference to and exposition of the theatre’s own processes in performance. Boenisch’s use of the term reflexive to describe this process inscribes the way in which the spectators relate to this doubled awareness. In theatre - a medium wherein the act of staging a text is intrinsically a reflexive act - the spectators witness the process of this doubling implicitly and the term takes on a more layered quality. For Boenisch:

[The] suggested term of ‘reflexive dramaturgy’ seeks to describe dramaturgic textures which avoid a closing synthesis and instead stage that very ‘rift between the discourse of the text and that of the theatre.’ (Boenisch 2010, p. 164)

Boenisch’s term, by referring to the dialectic “rift” between the text and the theatre, pinpoints the precise simultaneity that exists in the “dialectic gap between the text and its production” (Boenisch, 2010, p. 164). The ways that this gap is created, sustained and oriented in recent Australian textual dramaturgies is defined by ‘play’.

This term *play* is also central to this research, in that it further elucidates the specific process of simultaneity in the chosen works. Play allows this research to approach the process of interplay and interaction between two separate

performance modes (fictive and non-fictive, representational and expository), not simply defining them as being separate, but instead analysing their productive and dialectic relationship. As such this thesis will refer to the 'playful' quality of these performance strategies. This should be taken in the Schillerian sense, as expounded by Boenisch in *Directing Scenes and Senses: The Thinking of Regie* (2015). Boenisch re-employs Schiller's formation of the opposing *Stofftrieb* (sense/sensuous drive) and *Formtrieb* (form drive), and the third, mediating principle *Spieltrieb* (play drive). This formulation rejects the binary opposition of reason and feeling, instead conceiving of 'play' as a fundamental force in our understanding of the aesthetic. In his *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller states: "The object of the play instinct, represented in a general statement, may therefore bear the name of *living form*; a term that serves to describe all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, and what people style, in the widest sense, *beauty*" (Schiller, 1909). This "living form", the mediation of materiality and rationality in art, is a tool to understand the in-between theoretical spaces that are never either/or but multiple. Boenisch states:

His 'play' activates the full spectrum of meaning in the German term 'Spiel haben': to have the tolerance and flexibility in a technical sense – to 'play' in order not to get stuck. As agile and mobile mediator, 'play' thus makes opposites meet and establishes a link between what appeared as mutually exclusive. (Boenisch 2015, p. 58)

For this thesis, 'play' does not indicate a childlike appeal to imagination or clown-like non-sequiturs, rather it is a precise indication of mediation. Employing this framework throughout my case studies, I develop the argument that the dramaturgy of these works foregrounds textual mediation, and suggest a complex meeting point between what could be described as dramatic and postdramatic theatre, a playfully reflexive highlighting of the inherent intermedial nature of (re)staging texts in the theatre medium.

Research Design

In order to demonstrate that the dramaturgy informing the work of Sisters Grimm, Benedict Andrews and Daniel Schlusser Ensemble creates explicit encounters with textual material by foregrounding theatre as a site of medial transmission, I have chosen to examine three significantly different case studies – *The Sovereign Wife*, *Moving Target* and *M+M* - alongside outlining a practical application of my research in the form of a new text and theatre work – *Tom William Mitchell*. By focusing on recent theatre projects presented in different contexts and characterised by specific production processes, the thesis sets out to extend the criteria used to assess the use of text beyond the term text-based theatre. This enables an analysis that is orientated by processes that develop through largely traditional structures of producing dramatic text, beginning with an example of a process using a pre-written draft rehearsed for performance, through to works that challenge this structure with collaborative making strategies, and finally, a work that does not reproduce any actual textual material from its source material in performance. The case study methodology allows me to compare and contrast, providing a structural axis (Meyrick 2014a) for my analysis that connects theoretical strands of my research to comparative practical examples. Alongside the case studies of the three pre-existing works, I present an exegetical account of my own practical application of central tenets of my study in a performance work, which I will discuss below. As such, the comparative case study model provides “a flexible approach” (Meyrick 2014a) that is responsive to the particularities of each work, while still developing my larger approach to text’s dramaturgical function in contemporary work.

As Mary Luckhurst notes, definitions of dramaturgy are “bitterly contested” (2006, p. 11), but in making this point she argues that the term refers to the internal structure of the play-text, its “plot, construction of narrative, character, time-frame and stage action” (2006, pg. 10) and the “external” (2006, p. 10) features of the staging. For this thesis, however, these layers of meaning should be considered as being interwoven and interrelational. Boenisch defines dramaturgy as “the resulting ‘texture’ of a theatre production through the artist’s

process of ‘texturing’” (Boenisch 2010, p. 163). Dramaturgy, in this context, therefore should not be thought of as relating only to the profession of the dramaturg, but instead to the interior logic of the performance, how it constructs a relationship with its textual source material and the means through which this is communicated to spectators. Throughout this thesis, the dramaturgy of the three pre-existing works, *The Sovereign Wife*, *Moving Target* and *M+M*, is analysed through a first-hand viewing experience of the performances¹² plus recordings of the productions, and, while I make reference to their textual source material, my focus is on text as it is *mediated* in performance in each work. In this way, despite, or indeed because of, the case studies’ considerable dramaturgical differences, they provide examples that are “both unique and representative” and articulate “a certain kind of problem” (Meyrick 2014a). Close comparative analysis of this ‘problem’ allows me to develop a detailed understanding of the in-between nature of dramaturgies staged at both independent and main-stage levels.

In order to further test and explore the functioning of dramaturgical approaches that foreground the mediality of textual material, I developed a text and subsequent theatre production, *Tom William Mitchell*. This practical application of my research sits alongside the case studies as what Meyrick would describe as a Performance as Research project. Meyrick points to Dennis Strand’s definition of Performance as Research as occurring when “a production becomes an intervention in an established scholarly debate, dialogue or discourse” (Strand 1998, p. 89). However, for this research, my practical component is not so much an intervention as an exploration and *extension* of my research’s stated aims in so far as it provides another lens through which to examine the dramaturgy of text’s mediation. Experimenting in this way, as both the writer and the director of the work, allowed me direct experience of the implementation of medial transmission in theatre, which both enriched my analysis of their function and provides an account of practical research in this field. By reflecting exegetically on this process in the thesis, the ways in which these textual processes can be foregrounded in rehearsal and production are specified. This is not to suggest

¹² *The Sovereign Wife* – seen 18th July, 2013; *M+M* – seen 8th October, 2013; *Moving Target* – seen 15th March, 2008.

the production succeeded in exemplifying these concepts, or even wholly achieved them in performance, but the practical application and first-hand testing of these techniques contributes a primary account of the nuances and diversity present in the realisation of reflexive mediality in performance, and seeks to make an original contribution to an emergent field of research.

To explore the idea of textual dramaturgies and their multi-faceted function as compositional tools, this thesis develops over three case studies, beginning with Sister's Grimm's ironically 'Australian' production *The Sovereign Wife*. This independent work's subversive and critical approach to Australian values serves to introduce key concepts relating to recent dramaturgical treatments of text in an Australian context. It shows the complex approach to fictive elements in text and production, and how a playful simultaneity and awareness is produced in performance. Greene and Flanders stage the dialectic between text and production clearly, as the text's values have been written in order for the production to critique and undercut them. From there, the next chapter moves to a main-stage context with *Moving Target*, examining the ways in which a changed process of making - in this case, long form improvisations and research - resulted in a responsive text and performance that produced reflexive dramaturgical elements and an encounter with the text. Considering the process of theatre making in this way further develops my research to include the ways in which changing notions of authorship re-define concepts of textual dramaturgy. In the third Chapter, another alternative process of making is outlined in my own work, *Tom William Mitchell*. This exegetical Chapter deals specifically with intermedial strategies of text and how this developed throughout the work's construction in the non-theatrical form of a screenplay. The political motivations for this dramaturgy are further expounded upon through my work's interest in populism and media as a mechanism of control; this allows me to draw out the broader implications and political motivations evident in the dramaturgical treatment of textual material. Finally, I examine *M+M*, a largely non-verbal piece of visual theatre responding to the text of a novel. By concluding with this work, ostensibly the furthest from a

recognisable notion of what is considered text-based theatre, I consider the shifting use of text in relation to recent debates on adaptation in an Australian context to contest and thereby re-think the straightforward notion of text-based theatre as a reductive term. In doing so, I articulate the use of text in theatre as a site of reflexive mediation, identify the ways in which artists emphasise this and argue that analysis of *M+M* constitutes, as Croggon prompts, a way of re-thinking the function of text in the context of the Australian theatre landscape.

Literature Review

The scholarly field surrounding Australian theatre works arguably operates around three strands: dramatic theatre; infrastructure and funding of Australian theatre(s); and a history of, or theoretical approach to, non-illusory postdramatic work. Further, the larger anthologies and historical records leave the majority of the artists studied in this thesis largely unstudied, with a few exceptions that I will outline below. First, however, I will describe the several areas of study that operate as key focal points in the scholarly field surrounding Australian work. The most ubiquitous of these is the discourse surrounding Australian playwriting, and the attempt to identify a national drama in terms of themes and politics. This is exemplified by John McCallum's *Belonging: Australian Playwriting in the 20th Century* (2009) and playwright and critic Leonard Radic's *Contemporary Australian Drama* (2006), two books engaged in analysis of individual Australian playwrights, mainly grouping them by their period of writing and linking thematic strands. Methodologically these two books are similar, in that they focus on the dramatic text as the main site and generator of meaning, leaving out the theatrical production or indeed, their own reception of these plays in performance. Denise Varney's *Radical Visions 1968-2008: The Impact of the Sixties on Australian Drama* (2011) is more explicitly interested in the plays' structural form and how this may have developed from a radicalised political commitment post-1969. Hilary Glow's *Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the public agenda* (2007) combines both approaches by developing thematic chapters on particular political issues and sites of conflict. The playwrights

studied in all four of these books overlap considerably, and so too does the main strategy of analysis, examining the dramatic text in its static state without production.

An alternative camp that does focus almost explicitly on production is interested in the development of postdramatic theatre in an Australian context. Postdramatic discourse in relation to Australian theatre practitioners has been studied in Margaret Hamilton's *Transfigured Stages: Major Practitioners and Theatre Aesthetics in Australia* (2011), which provides a detailed analysis of specific Australian practitioners from the 1980s to the late 1990s. Kerrie Schaefer's studies of Sydney performance (1998, 2008, 2010), Peta Tait's volume *Body Show/s: Australia viewings of live performance* (2000) and Yana Taylor's 2007 unpublished dissertation on the influence of Suzuki based training practices in Sydney contemporary performance work are also engaged in this field.

Another area of study is the historical record of institutions in Australian theatre, surveys of companies and collectives, the structures surrounding them, and the government and philanthropic funding that supports them. This is the area of Geoffrey Milne's *Theatre Australia (Un)Limited: Australian Theatre Since the 1950s* (2004), Gabrielle Wolf's *Make It Australian: The Australian Performing Group, the Pram Factory and New Wave Theatre* (2008) and Julian Meyrick's works examining Australia's theatre history and cultural policy (2002, 2014b, 2017¹³). These books do discuss form and, in some ways, the dramaturgical strategies of the companies they profile, although this is more as a way of defining their difference from other companies, and it is not detailed in theory.

Significantly, all of the volumes in each discursive field end their surveys around 2000, meaning that there is a decade of theatre works that is largely unstudied outside of short-form criticism. The exception to this, the recent volume *Catching*

¹³ Meyrick's 2017 work *Australian Theatre After the New Wave: Policy, Subsidy and the Alternative Artist* was unable to be incorporated fully into this study, given its recent publication.

Australian Theatre in the 2000s (Fotheringham and Smith 2013), still functions more as a historical analysis of the market force reasons for dramaturgical development than of the developments themselves in theoretical terms. Kathryn Kelly's chapter, 'Post-Millennial Australian Dramaturgies: Changes since 2000', does identify formal shifts in Australian theatre in this period, although these are mostly in reference to the rise of non-narrative performance, a sideline to her argument for greater respect and resourcing for an older generation of playwrights and text-based dramaturgs (of which she herself is one). Laura Ginter's chapter focuses on Australian directors and their approach to the rehearsal room, consisting of thematically grouped interview excerpts with Benedict Andrews, Neil Armfield, Lee Lewis, Michael Gow and others. While invaluable as an insight into process, the particularities of each director's dramaturgical approach are not explored in detail. The directors themselves also largely come from a generation whose formative works were made before 2000; only Andrews stands in for a newer generation of theatre makers. Andrews is the subject of two more substantial journal articles examining his aesthetic and particular significant productions. Hamilton's (2013) recent consideration of Andrews' production of *The Seagull* in relation to Patrick White's conception of a "great Australian emptiness" is an analysis of the ironic modes of realness and theatricality within the work, comparing Andrews' approach to that of German director Thomas Ostermeier's neo(n)-realism (Hamilton 2013, p. 40), a term first used by Boenisch in relation to Ostermeier. Alison Croggon's article also acknowledges this "distinctly European awareness" (2010) in the work of Andrews, while similarly highlighting the importance of his response to the Australian context. Although her article is essentially a reformatting of several reviews that first appeared on her blog Theatre Notes, responding to the works *The War of the Roses*, *Moving Target* and *The Season at Sarsaparilla*, it is useful in its understanding of Andrews as a "text centred director whose works are notable for their intelligent formality" (2010). The particular nature of Andrews' formality, and the intelligence of the dramaturgic approach in *The War of the Roses*, was also the focus of my Honours thesis (Rogers 2010), which included a wide-ranging interview with Andrews that will be drawn on for this dissertation.

A recent manuscript that does engage with contemporary works is Sarah French's *Staging Queer Feminisms: Sexuality and Gender in Australian Performance 2005-2015* (2017), which studies independent artists like Sisters Grimm, The Rabble, Brown Council and Hot Brown Honey, developing an approach to "the intersection of feminism and queer in Australian performance" (French 2017, p. 1). This study not only analyses the intent of these artists, but details the theatrical modes through which they achieve their aims. In this way, French's consideration of Sisters Grimm's use of 'racial drag' is invaluable to this thesis's approach to their work. Her development of this concept relates to foundational queer theorists relevant to my study - Judith Butler (1988, 1990), David Halperin (1997) and Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick (1993) - and also further develops recent considerations on Queer in Australian performance by Jill Dolan and Alyson Campbell. My Chapter on *The Sovereign Wife* utilises this field to frame the relationship between Sisters Grimm's work and the dominantly heteronormative and patriarchal society their work responds to.

It is important to note, however, that, for the most part, the theatre works that this thesis uses to exemplify recent directions in Australian dramaturgy have only been considered critically in the form of short reviews. This is in part due to how recent some of these productions are, but it is also a consequence of the changing print media and online landscape. In the mid-2000s, online blogging was providing a clear alternative to the dearth of responses in mainstream press, particularly in relation to covering independent theatre. This means that, while independent work was getting covered, this coverage was limited to a few critics, whose varied attitudes can be categorised into those who attempt to engage with the works' theatrical form and dramaturgy, and those who dismiss them as self-indulgent or incomprehensible. In response to this gap, my thesis seeks to formulate a new approach to conceptualising Australian theatre dramaturgically.

The features of recent Australian dramaturgies are illuminated by international critical writings on the emergence of new dramaturgic forms focusing on the terms reflexive, relational and intermedial. These are terms that have come to prominence in the period since the publication of Lehmann's seminal text

Postdramatic Theatre ([1999] 2006), and they are employed to articulate alternative borderlines and meeting points between, variously, classic texts and *Regietheater*, interactive or audience focused works, the use of live and pre-recorded video in theatre work and theatre as an active process of intermedial becoming. Two particular scholars working in this field are Boenisch, who has written a series of articles on reflexive dramaturgy (2010), intermediality (2003b) and relational dramaturgy (2012), and Duška Radosavljević, who studies relational dramaturgy and theatre-making in her book *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (2013). Both critics are interested in a broad but linked field of contemporary theatre artists, including Toneelgroep Amsterdam and Ivo Van Hove, Thomas Ostermeier, Ontroerend Goed, Simon Stephens and Sebastian Nubling, Tim Crouch, Reckless Sleepers, Shunt, Frank Carstorf, Nature Theatre of Oklahoma and NEST. Their dramaturgic discoveries within the work of international theatre artists provide a key point of reference and theoretical framework for my discussion of Australian work.

Other perspectives on these productions in the form of press interviews with the artists, academic writing, podcasts, blog posts, and short form reviews will serve as supporting (or dissenting) material. I also more explicitly engage with intermediality studies and their relationship to theatre in my exegetical Chapter (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, Boenisch 2003b, Hamilton 2014). My own development process is recorded through personal reflection on the work, the play-text itself provided in the appendix as well supporting images and video footage of the production at the University of Wollongong. This approach allows me to contextualise my practice's aims and intentions with the process I used to achieve them, and provide a record of how my scholarly aims with the work manifested (or failed to manifest) in performance.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two – *The Sovereign Wife*

This Chapter analyses a work that actively played with notions of ‘Australianess’ and Australian values. In *The Sovereign Wife*, Sisters Grimm created a text with values that the production of that text critiqued and ridiculed. The idea of Australianess that is set up by the text - a white, male and apolitical Australia - is challenged by cross-gendered and cross-racial casting in the production. This presents two alternate visions of Australianess alongside one another. This strategy is explored through Žižek’s notion of a parallax, making clear the foregrounded rift between text and production. This Chapter also uses this Žižekian approach to further utilise the concept of reflexivity as developed by Boenisch. Using this concept, I expand upon the “critical and subversive possibilities” (French 2017, p. 117) of Camp and Queer Feminism as a dramaturgical strategy that Sarah French has posited in relation to Sisters Grimm’s works. The Chapter concludes by returning to Žižek and positing the potential political viability of these strategies in resisting dominant cultural discourses. Through analysing this work’s complex and playful reflexive strategies with text, this thesis sets up the major features of a dramaturgy that plays with text’s potential in theatre and develops language to describe the theatrical ways this is achieved in performance.

Chapter Three – *Moving Target*

This Chapter looks more specifically at how a shifting conception of theatrical authorship is contributing to the reflexive dramaturgies developing in Australian theatre. Using Radosavljević’s use of the term ‘theatre-making’ and her understanding of the ‘ensemble way of working’ in relation to the hierarchy of theatrical elements, *Moving Target* is posited as an example of a process wherein the text and production produce complex interwoven meanings. Marius Von Mayenburg’s use of narrative splitting, choral dialogue and re-represented action

was complemented by Andrews' construction of a ritualistic performative game structure that sat alongside the text. Using Andrews' reference to *Moving Target's* "two texts" I further develop understanding of theatrical techniques that sit outside a postdramatic/representational binary. This Chapter develops philosopher Giorgio Agamben's notion of an apparatus to further define how new Australian dramaturgies mediate the text through the *apparatuses* of performance, sound, light and presence. In doing so, the 'openness' of the fictive construct and performative game in *Moving Target* produces a kind of medial labour, both for the performers and spectators, in transmitting and receiving the text. This Chapter posits the foregrounding of this process as working *with and through text*, a notion which significantly expands on historical considerations of dramatic and postdramatic theatre.

Chapter Four – Tom William Mitchell

This Chapter examines the development of *Tom William Mitchell*, the practical or performance as research component of this project. The explicit focus in this Chapter is on the foregrounding of the processes of medial transmission through the use of multiple, overlapping media. It describes how *Tom William Mitchell* was written as a screenplay in order to highlight the medial processes that occur in the transfer from page to stage. This reflexive strategy of text is 'built in' to the play-text so as to highlight the text as a 'surface' in the production, a concept which I develop in relation to Lehmann's understanding of theatre's 'architecture'. I also point to how the intermedial processes present in recent Australian dramaturgies can be seen as producing *hyper*-mediality, which I understand through Hamilton's (2014) development of Kattenbelt's work.

In framing the performance as research component of this project, I utilise Julian Meyrick's (2014a) work on case study methodology to define the "broader intellectual vista" this Chapter engages in. By providing an account of the development of the text and production outcome, presented at the University of Wollongong in July, 2017, this Chapter reflects on that process and its

motivations, essentially recording my experimentation with the practical application of ideas in this thesis as a way of augmenting my understanding of the field. While acknowledging that aim and outcome are not always aligned in performance as research projects, this Chapter draws connections between the way the text was developed first as a screenplay, and the eventual focus on creating an intermedial performative mode – unpacking medial transmission as a central dramaturgical strategy of recent Australian work.

Chapter Five – *M+M*

This Chapter examines a work in which the text forms only the source material for a largely visual production. *M+M* is a theatre work that draws on the images, plot features and characters of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita*, mashed up with images from Putin's Russia, to form a new work about 'art as resistance'. This work vastly differs from *The Sovereign Wife* in that it does not reproduce any pre-written words as spoken language, instead using new improvisations and responses to the text to form the bulk of the performance. By examining such formally disparate works, this thesis re-defines text-based theatre in an Australian context.

This Chapter examines how the novel's manuscript forms a 'poetic reservoir' for the theatre work, and argues that this provides a considerable expansion of the term text-based theatre. The text is defined here as a go-between for the spectators' understanding of the theatre event and the artists' dramaturgical approach. There is an 'assumed knowledge' of the text that would shift the way in which you read the performance, but the production functions also without this knowledge in the spectator. The text, then, is employed to ground the work of the company in 'something', allowing multiple, variant and complex meanings to emerge from the use of the text as inspiration. This Chapter also develops the notion of 'fictive space' within the work, and demonstrates further how specific examples of work using text respond to written material. Boenisch's notion of *Regie* is employed to help describe this process, a definition that provides this thesis with a way around the impasse of reading texts in ways that repeat

notions of authorial hierarchy. This analysis extends my exploration of dramatic and postdramatic strategies to include what may loosely be called adaptation. The Chapter concludes with a short consideration of the 'adaption debate' in relation to new Australian productions of classics, and re-visits these arguments in light of Schlusser's work.

Chapter Two:

The Sovereign Wife

It's the ability of Sisters Grimm to create spaces of both play and political critique that has made the company so successful. The pair deftly balance entertainment – borne of an investment in comedy, narrative and the exciting fragility of live performance – with a deep intellectualism: in references to genre, in destruction of the conventions of theatre and in constant questioning of society and politics. (Howard 2016)

Sisters Grimm is the artistic and writing partnership of playwright and director Declan Greene and performer and writer Ash Flanders. They describe themselves as a “Melbourne based queer D.I.Y theatre group” (Sisters Grimm 2014). The first Sisters Grimm performance I saw was at This Is Not Art Festival in Newcastle in 2010. It was called *The Rimming Club*, a cruel skewering of *The Swimming Club*, a Melbourne Theatre Company main-stage show written by Hannie Rayson. It contained all the hallmarks of Sisters Grimm’s oeuvre: clichéd dialogue, hammy performances, drag, a queer take on genre and, above all, an inclusive and riotous relationship with the audience. There was constant reference to “the empty sea”, in the production, a pun on the abbreviation “MTC” (Melbourne Theatre Company). The promo image for the show was a remake of the original play’s poster, with anuses photo-shopped in place of the actor’s faces, an image which the MTC threatened to litigate against.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Greene in Blake 2014.



Figure 1. Sisters Grimm Publicity Shot. Photography by Claryssa Humennyj-Jameson, 2013.

A few years later the Sisters Grimm company was programmed at the MTC itself, with their work *The Sovereign Wife*, another satirical exploration of, as writer/director Declan Greene freely admits, "contemporary Australian theatre at the MTC and what you tend to think of when you think of that" (in Bailey 2013). *The Sovereign Wife* is a three-part historical drama in the style of Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia*, set in the colonial era in the fictional outback town of Rabbit Flats. Sisters Grimm's performance of *The Sovereign Wife* offers this thesis a unique example not only of reflexive dramaturgical strategies that foreground the medial transmission of text but also of a production that specifically ridicules 'Australianess' and the thematic features of Australia's theatrical history. Stylistically, Flanders describes the work as a mash up of "poor theatre, Australian Gothic, image-based new theatre, the German tradition that's really popular right now. There's rock eisteddfod, stand up comedy, fourth-wall naturalism" (in Bailey 2013). This scattergun approach typifies the work of Sisters Grimm. Greene and Flanders take pre-existing forms, attitudes and tropes and inhabit them, critiquing and subverting them from the inside. For this thesis, the interpolating approach to form in *The Sovereign Wife* provides a way of understanding the active and critical relationship intrinsic to specific

dramaturgical approaches to textual source material, and with theatre history. By identifying this approach at a formal level, I seek to avoid what Zoe Coombs Marr, a comedian and queer performance maker, describes as a typical misreading of queer work:

If you make a non-narrative work, people think you did narrative wrong... it's like eating spaghetti and going "this is a terrible soup". It's not the same thing." (Coombs-Marr in Neutze 2014a)

Sisters Grimm's work, however, directly engages with narrative form by queering dominant normative relations. In light of this, I argue that Sisters Grimm's playful and iconoclastic approach to text and genre stages the "rift between the discourse of the text and that of the theatre" that both Boenisch and Lehmann identify, resulting in what Howard calls "spaces of both play and political critique" (Howard 2016) best articulated through queer theory (Butler 1988, 1990, 1997; Halperin 1990, 1997) relating to performativity and camp. These observations are further developed by Boenisch's notion of reflexive dramaturgy, which this Chapter extends through Slavoj Žižek's conception of a parallax. Positioning reflexivity as a key concept to describe these dramaturgical developments in Australian theatre allows me to situate the spectators' experience of the text as an 'encounter' – an active engagement with the text as a medial process of representation that can be critiqued, subverted and politicised through performance. The foregrounding of this schism between the text's values and the production's subversion of them also inscribes the spectator's gaze onto the performance, producing an encounter with the text instead of its simple reception. Highlighting this rift between the text and production as a properly medial process clarifies the principal characteristics of recent textual dramaturgies in Australian theatre.

In my analysis, I utilise reference to the production that I saw in September 2013, as well as a video recording and the play-text in written form. It is important to note that, in this production, the text was workshopped and written pre-rehearsal by Flanders and Greene. While some textual shifts occurred in the

room, the mode of development of this text broadly echoes the way in which the majority of dramatic theatre is produced in this country. This is significant given the way in which the formal features and dramaturgical strategies in *The Sovereign Wife* differ despite being made through this established production model. This particular work allows me to outline the major features that are distinguishing the approach to text by contemporary Australian artists.

Outlining the ways these particular dramaturgical treatments of text were fostered in *The Sovereign Wife* provides an initial understanding of the terms of reference of my research and their application in my analysis. In this Chapter, I propose that the way in which Sisters Grimm are responding to Australian theatre history parallels their approach to the use of text, a profoundly political queering of dominant forms and narratives. Text, in their use of it, functions reflexively to point back at its own historical silences and erasures, critiquing aspects of the historical representation of 'Australianess' through the narrative and genre forms in which 'Australianess' has been constructed culturally in theatre, TV and film. I argue that this compositional approach is one that can be defined, via Žižek, as 'inhabiting so as to critique', and that this identifies a key aspect of the playful and reflexively medial relationship fostered through the use text in recent Australian theatre works. In doing so, this Chapter delineates concepts central to this thesis's reading of recent works and frames dramaturgical strategies intrinsic to the use of text as being foregrounded in *The Sovereign Wife*. As such, this Chapter advances the particular strategies and motivations behind the use of textual material in Australian work that exists beyond the limited concept of text-based theatre.

Act One: Queering the Narrative of Australian Theatre History

The Sovereign Wife begins with a scene appropriated from the ABC drama *Seachange*¹⁵. Murphy, an inner-city journalist and her 'emo' child, arrive in

¹⁵ *Seachange*, developed by ABC TV, was a serialised soap opera that followed a city lawyer's post in a small coastal town; it ran in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Ballarat.

ANDREW: What brings you to town. Got a big scoop?

MURPHY: Hardly. Some old diary was found in the Ballarat Library. Apparently it's a 'fresh new take' on the Eureka Stockade.

ANDREW: That doesn't sound like your kind of a story.

MURPHY: Hole in one, Greg Norman. Turns out my great-great-grandmother wrote this masterpiece, so it ended up on my desk. I could care less.

(Greene and Flanders 2013, p. 4)

Andrew, the rough trade hotel operator, gives them a room and, after some flirting and innuendo, they discover the journals of Moira O Flaherty, whom we will follow throughout the rest of the piece. This is staged against a painted backdrop of clouds and blue sky, an ironically Australian skyline. The journalist heroine is played by Ash Flanders in Drag, her daughter by Morgan Macguire, who parodies in excess the performative codes of 'teenagerdom'. The unstable representation of identity at the start of the work serves as an orientation for the kind of theatrical play throughout. But at this particular moment, as we are taken back to the time of Moira O Flaherty, the work draws the spectator's attention to the generic, hackneyed qualities of this type of colonial drama, framing the work as an investigation of genre, and re-writing the conventions of Australian drama through a queer lens.

This approach to re-reading and re-inscribing genre conventions is what Sarah French, in her detailed study *Staging Queer Feminisms: Sexuality and Gender in Australia Performance, 2005-2015*, links to Sisters Grimm's position as queer artists:

Their performances employ a politicised camp sensibility to 'queer' heteronormative and patriarchal culture. By placing queer and minority

subjects at the forefront of their performances, Sisters Grimm expose their audiences to alternative social relations to those of dominant culture and potentially influence new understandings of subjectivity and relationships in the social world. (French 2017, p. 115)

French's illuminating response to Sisters Grimm's work reinforces Greene's understanding of their approach as being:

... more about taking an outsider look on the world or using our own cultural positioning as something that can destabilise the mainstream — the word 'queer' is something that destabilises or upends — it's a verb — to 'queer'. (in Neutze 2014a)

This working definition builds on theorist David Halperin's understanding of queer as a "not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (Halperin 1997, p. 62). For Halperin, queer demarcates not a specific set of sexual practices, but instead "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (1997, p. 62). Halperin is specifically talking about groups and individuals that have been marginalised for their non-normative sexual practices here, but his point has been extended to encompass other spheres of marginalisation. A recent collection of queer theory, *Language and Violence*, edited by Daniel Silva, holds that:

A queer positionality can be applied to an infinite variety of social, historical and cultural constructions, including racial, ethnic, social class, religious, scientific and academic normatives, etc. (Lewis and Bastros 2017, p. 194)

Queer theatre then, in this light, arguably demarcates that which is marginalised in the specific field of theatre. Nonetheless, in examining a list of contemporary Australian theatre practitioners whose work is often identified as coming from a queer perspective - Little Ones Theatre, The Rabble, Nick Coyle, Zoe Coombs Marr and director Adena Jacobs - it is worth questioning whether their work *is*

marginalised in our theatre culture. Many of these practitioners have had their work staged to considerable acclaim in Australian and international contexts. Indeed, Sisters Grimm are some of the most produced of these artists and, as French suggests, have “achieved notable success on the main stages” (2017, p. 117). Here, then, it is important to distinguish the locus of Sisters Grimm’s queering of the normative, rather than simply reading their queer positionality as relating to their position in the larger context of Australian performance, a reading which risks attributing the status of queer artists only to a perceived marginalisation of presentation opportunity, already a subjective and prejudiced viewpoint. This Chapter instead reads their queer positionality through the way in which their work plays with and relates to dominant social, historical, cultural and, importantly, *theatrical* constructions of normativity. This analysis of the medial processes in the narrative and dramaturgical construction *The Sovereign Wife* allows a reading of the ways in which the work queers. The position of this particular work, then, presented at a main-stage company, far from undermining their status as outsider artists, arguably gave Sisters Grimm more scope to critique and parody mainstream normative culture, by queering MTC’s theatrical conventions at the MTC itself, conventions that, as Sisters Grimm identify, relate to ‘Australianess’ as it is constructed through its national drama.

McCallum has explored the development of what he describes as Australia’s nationalist drama. He comprehensively characterises works of Australian playwrighting by how they thematically develop over time, linking examples of plays and playwrights together to provide a sense of how a uniquely Australian drama developed. Rather than tracking precise periods of activity, these thematic links provide a sense of the concerns and formal quirks of Australian drama. This enables the examination of how *The Sovereign Wife* responds to this historical drama. The main dramatic form is that of the ‘station drama’, a form that pits a family unit against the hostile environment of the Australian outback. McCallum points to “Marjorie McLeod’s *Within These Walls* (1936), Lynn Foster’s *There Is No Armour* (1939) and, most successful of all, Dorothy Blewett’s *The First Joanna* (1948)” (J McCallum, 2009, pg. 80) as the prime examples of the station drama. He suggests that their archetypal main character, “the battling

mum of the early bush dramas has become a matriarch, struggling to make good the sacrifice of her femininity to the pioneering life, as she dominates succeeding generations” (pg. 80). Moira O’Flaherty is such a figure in *The Sovereign Wife*, prevailing over the station that she bought with her ill-gotten funds from an illicit affair. It also follows the convention of centring the drama on a female figure over a vast period of time, and in this way it echoes the above plays. Several characters and narrative features of *The Sovereign Wife* are also reminiscent of earlier examples of Australian drama: the cruel foreman on the goldfields, the struggling prospector and the clear class divides. McCallum also points to the significance of the land as a driving narrative force in early Australian drama:

Instead of individuals, the agents that prompted dramatic events were oppressive heat, huge distances or long droughts suddenly interrupted by devastating floods or fires. The dramatic characters were the least significant things in a landscape that, hostile or seductive, was brought into imagined being over the course of a century. In many of the most enduring stories the characters were, literally, lost in it. (J McCallum 2009, p. 43)

The Sovereign Wife’s narrative emerges from an engagement with the dramatic tradition of these particular narratives of Australian identity, but the staging language of these works is also utilised. McCallum points to the “amateur theatre based on a visual vocabulary of painted backdrops, wings, flats and borders ... the bush life quickly became a series of set clichés” (J McCallum 2009, p. 44) of these early works of Australian drama. This style is ironically returned to by Sisters Grimm, whose set design consisted of an amateur-theatre painted canvas filling the stage with a big blue sky and dodgily wheeled-on painted flats and interiors. For Sisters Grimm, re-producing the aesthetics and narrative elements of the Australian dramatic canon functions doubly, both contributing to the narrational logic of the play and contributing to the production’s critique of Australian cultural values as constructed through the medium of film and television. Through this duality, the spectator’s attention is drawn to the

'obviousness' of these conventions and, as such, the play engenders a critical relationship with itself.

Alongside Australian theatrical history, an understanding and playful re-reading of cinematic genre is a key feature of Sisters Grimm's oeuvre. In *The Sovereign Wife*, the key text is Baz Lurhman's epic box-office success *Australia*. This work exemplifies the archetypical vision of Australian identity that Sisters Grimm confront with their work. This is a vision of Australia as predominantly white and heterosexual, struggling against the odds to make a life in a harsh, unforgiving landscape. Flanders describes these tropes as representing a value system:

We've heard these stories our whole lives ... and can identify the values those stories celebrate. We know that Australians romanticise an outlaw or a strong woman or the mystery of the landscape, celebrate mateship or coming together or fighting authority. (Flanders in Furhmann 2013)

This strategy is reflected in the work's explicit focus on what constitutes Australian identity and, specifically, how identity is formed by narrative discourse in film, by the value system it enforces. The narrative of *The Sovereign Wife*, in setting up a white woman's struggle against an uncivilised country and a cultural melting pot, conforms to what film theorist Ross Gibson describes as the dominant concern of Australian filmmaking: "in so many ways, the majority of Australian features have been about landscape" (Gibson 1992, p. 63). Gibson writes that Australian film narratives "knowingly or unknowingly ... are all engaging with the dominant mythology of white Australia. They are all partaking of the landscape tradition which, for two hundred years, has been used by white Australians to promote a sense of the significance of European society in 'the antipodes'" (Gibson 1992, p. 64). The setting on the Victorian Goldfields also pre-empted a more recent observation about Australian film discourse, that of the importance of mining to the Australian psyche. Referencing recent films *Red Dog* and *Japanese Story*, Ben Chapman argues that "mythology about mining is recasting the tropes of Australian colonial identity – the idea of a productive use

for Australia's centre" (2014, p. 31).

In constructing a narrative that engages knowingly with these mythologies about Australian identity and landscape, Sisters Grimm highlight their status as illusory and performative cultural formulations. By re-writing and re-inscribing tropes in Australian cultural product, both film and theatre, through a queer lens, *The Sovereign Wife* queers dominant narratives that have historically been the site of Australian values and identity. In doing so, they produce a complex and playful critique of one of the oldest producers of such cultural product in Australia - the MTC. By using their queer positionality in relation to their presentation context, parodying and pillorying tropes of Australian drama, Sisters Grimm destabilise normative relations, not only relating to narrative and Australian identity, but received understandings of form and text embedded in the MTC context. By placing a queer(ed) subject at the centre of an ironically 'Australian' story, the historical values of Australian drama are re-focused in performance. By writing a text that has values the production eventually destabilises, Flanders and Greene also queer what has historically been understood as dramatic theatre's subordinate relationship to text, highlighting instead what Lehmann calls the rift between text and its production. Their active queering of dominant relations in the narrative and form of *The Sovereign Wife* produces a complex critique of these values in performance. Central to this process is the way in which the work engenders the spectator's awareness of the satirical approach to narrative and form – and thereby, the text itself. This encounter with the text as a layer of the production, able to be subverted in performance, is key to Sisters Grimm's dramaturgy and a significant extension of standard concepts of text-based theatre that serve to illustrate the written text. In *The Sovereign Wife*, instead of being an illustration of textual material, the performance becomes a critique of the text itself, as it stages a re-engagement and re-orientation of Sisters Grimm's own pre-written text – a mode of considerably reflexive dramaturgy.

Reflexive Dramaturgy: Staging the Rift between Text and Production

In *The Sovereign Wife* the discourse of the text is *challenged* by the discourse of the production. This is what Lehmann, in relation to postdramatic theatre, calls the “rift” (2006, p. 46), a concept that Boenisch develops to describe reflexive dramaturgy, outlined in the introduction to this thesis. It should be noted here that in *The Sovereign Wife* the text is written by the same group that is producing it, whereas the majority of Boenisch’s examples of reflexive dramaturgy are of companies or directors working with pre-existing classic texts. The reflexivity in those cases functions as a critique or meeting point between the historicity of the text and the contemporary modes of production, and is inherently a process of intermedial adaptation. Although he points out that these processes do not only exist in relation to adaptive classic works, his chosen examples mostly do not reflect this. Employing Boenisch’s term in relation to *The Sovereign Wife*, a contemporary text written specifically for the production, nevertheless reveals a similarly intermedial process. By setting up dominant social relations, and racist caricatures and structures with the narrative of the work, the text provides adaptive material that the production can then critique and subvert. Indeed, the text is written to subvert, almost as a straw man for the production to attack. In this way, the more closely the text follows the tropes and form of Australian film and theatre, the more outrageously the production needs to queer these tropes. What this process engenders in the spectator, then, is precisely the reflexive awareness of the way in which they are being positioned. This productive dislocation is core to how reflexive dramaturgy functions in *The Sovereign Wife*: the mode of subversive political critique emerges from what Boenisch identifies as a dramaturgy of encounter.

Reflexive dramaturgies highlight and exploit the parallax of fictional representation and performative presence, of appearing and event, the spectators, as a direct effect, are confronted with their own dislocation and disorientation facing the performance of the text. (Boenisch 2010, p. 172)

Boenisch's use of this term, encounter, usefully re-orientates debate around spectator relations in contemporary theatre. His approach is a significant development of the conceptual split between dramatic and postdramatic forms. He identifies the ways in which both dramatic and postdramatic forms achieve a kind of 'closure', which previously had only been attributed to dramatic work. His observation significantly expands on scholarly approaches to new theatre forms, providing an approach that acknowledges contemporary theatre that utilises text and fictive forms, while at the same time playing with dislocating theatrical devices. He identifies that in dramatic theatre there is the closure of the fictive cosmos as Lehmann suggests, but that postdramatic works also engage in a kind of closure, which he describes as the closure of spectator perception "*opposite the performance*" (2010, p. 171). This contribution opens up an understanding of dramaturgies that avoid both types of closure. For Boenisch, these works engender an encounter with the text rather than its simple reception. The spectator's encounter with the text is characterised by a dislocated mode of viewing, engendered by the complex interplay of text and performance being experienced by the spectator, an example of a parallax mode of viewing. For Boenisch, this is the spectator's navigation of the work's fiction alongside the way in which the work exposes and plays with the fiction's position as 'closed'. This parallax produces a properly Žižekian phenomenon. A stain. This is a concept that he develops in relation to Lacan's concept of *objet petit a*, an algebraic sign for the unattainable object of desire. For Lacan, and thus for Žižek, this object has inscribed upon it an "unfathomable x" that makes it the focus of libidinal investment for the subject. This x is the stain, the site of shifted perspective that transubstantiates the object into the cause of desire, which, because of its very existence in the subject's viewing of the object, is the point from which the subject itself is constituted by the object. Žižek refers to Lacan's statement "sure, the picture is in my eye, but I, I am also in the picture" (Žižek 2006, p. 17) to explain this phenomenon.

In a theatrical context, we can define the stain as the points of highlighted disparity between fiction and presence, moments where the notions of a closed fictive cosmos or a perceptual closure are kept parallaxical. Because these

moments rely on a spectator's encounter with the text - their dislocation facing the object of the performance - these moments have inscribed in them the spectator's gaze, and as such, *include them in the picture*. This showcases the dialectic gap between text and performance as "that unfathomable X which forever eludes the symbolic grasp and thus causes the multiplicity of symbolic perspectives" (Žižek 2006, p. 18). By navigating this multiplicity of perspectives, the spectator is then implicated in the work. Or rather, the spectator constitutes their own encounter in relation to "the point from which the object itself returns the gaze" (Žižek 2006, p. 17). Boenisch constructs a playful phrase to describe this spectator experience of the stain: "Who's watching? Me!" (Boenisch 2014a, p. 48). In *The Sovereign Wife*, by highlighting and staging the disparity between the text's values and the production's critique of them, Sisters Grimm includes the spectator's gaze in the theatrical process, encouraging an encounter with the text rather than simply engaging in its reception. Staging the rift between text and performance in this way produces a complex and critical engagement with the thematic concerns of the work.

The Reflexive Dramaturgy of Drag

This encounter with the text is engendered in the spectator through a multitude of ways in *The Sovereign Wife*, not only through the overt signalling of the use of narrative tropes and clichés. Boenisch's concept of reflexive dramaturgies are elaborated on through an understanding of Sisters Grimm's approach to drag and camp. I argue that their theatrical language, which French describes as "significantly advancing upon traditional understandings of drag" and "employ(ing) cross-dressing across the categories of gender, sexuality, age, class, race and ethnicity" (2017, p. 116) is a central mode through which Sisters Grimm produce reflexive dramaturgy and the nexus of their political engagement with dominant discourses of Australian identity. Their subversive 're-casting' of the Australian station drama genre playfully re-orientates spectator perception of the text, producing not only reflexivity in the dramaturgy, but a focus on the

performativity of classifications of identity as they are produced in our localised theatre/film history and thus, as the work implies, how they manifest in Anglo-Australian culture more broadly.

When Ash Flanders enters the stage as Murphy, wearing a corporate power suit, high heels and a short haircut, the work is playing with normative gender signs. This is a consistent strategy within *The Sovereign Wife* and Sisters Grimm's work as a whole. What is normative, in the sense of an audience's conventional understanding of a sign system construct of gender, race or age, becomes subverted by drag, stereotype and multiple role casting. The actor's body, and its perceived gender or race, is not allowed to become a unified 'sign' representative of a stable character. Judith Butler describes the double nature of performativity's relationship to self as "an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates" (Butler 1990 p. 15). This internal and unspoken dialectic in everyday society then takes the form of repeated, ritualistic 'naturalisation' of gender roles. In theatre, a medium where the spectators are more aware of the gestic sign system of fictive character, in that their investment in the fiction demands their ability to read meaning past the knowledge that 'it's just actors up there', this ritualised performativity takes on a heightened significance. For Sisters Grimm, exposing this process through the characters in *The Sovereign Wife* becomes the site of rebellion against naturalisation. The performance of character and gender within its narrative discourse is critiqued as a *cultural formulation* and the content of the performance is queered. French suggests that "the cross-gendered and cross-racial casting choices in Sisters Grimm's performances produce highly subversive instances of performativity that potentially allow spectators to perceive the social and ideological construction of all gendered and raced identities" (2017, p. 116).

It is important to distinguish here, however, a further quality of Sisters Grimm's work that several critics have remarked on, and which evidently pushes the gender play beyond Judith Butler's understanding of drag as referring to the perceived interplay between the individual in drag and their audience. For

Butler, in the case of a man dressed as a woman, the audience perceive the first term (man) as the 'reality' of gender, while the second (woman) is perceived as "artifice, play, falsehood, illusion" (Butler 1990, p. 23). This exposes a politically subversive 'unreality' to the constructs of normative gender. In Sisters Grimm, however, Flanders in particular is often referred to as "not performing in drag, he is simply playing a woman" (Nuetze 2014b), or as being a "male actress" (STC 2014). Drag historian, Roger Baker, would define the term male actress as referring to older processes of Jacobean and Asian theatres, wherein there is a quality of "real disguise" (Baker 1994, p. 14), which, for him, does not indicate that the audience is "unaware of the actor's real gender" (1994, p. 14) but instead stresses the irrelevance of this knowledge for the fictive workings of the play. The political or subversive qualities of this aspect of drag is not explored by Baker, but we can identify them in *The Sovereign Wife*, where the artifice of Flanders playing Murphy or Moira O Flaherty, aligns with the illusory nature of theatrical representation, extending the spectator's perception to include 'Moira' as a further destabilisation of the Man/Woman binary. Reality and unreality in this context is ostensibly more in flux. Drag, which for Halberstam indicates not an impersonation of gender intended to be consistent, but a hyper-extension of the artificial qualities of gender constructs in society (1988, p. 232), does not entirely apply here. Rather, it is the metalepsis of gender representation wherein the subversion occurs, the minimal difference between Man, Woman, Ash and Moira. This can be seen as a strategy to upend the notion that "Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact" (Butler 1990, p. 15)¹⁶. Flanders states that his "approach to drag always involves

¹⁶ A scenario that demonstrates this phenomenon in an Australian context would be football player and commentator Paul Vautin dressing as Canadian singer Shania Twain and miming to her song "Man I Feel Like A Woman" on *The Footy Show* (Nine, 1999). Vautin's ambiguously gendered act is in this case a deflection of the reality of non-normative sexuality in favour of a comedic use of drag, effectively parodying ideas of ambiguous gender in a derogatory way. Sisters Grimm's practice avoids this trap, not only through their embedded cultural understanding as Queer artists, but by playfully engaging with the fictive qualities of gendered performativity.

an emphasis on character before gender, and that his relationship to his female characters is one of identification rather than impersonation" (French 2017, p. 144). In this way, the gender ambiguity in *The Sovereign Wife* refuses to represent itself as "dysfunction" (Halberstam 1988, p. 236), and instead functions, as Chris Boyd notes in *The Australian*, to "[take] us to a place where we're almost blind to gender, race, age and era" (2013). The minimal difference introduced by the fictive aspect of any representation of character produces this complex relationship, where of course we are not 'blind' to gender, but our normative reading of gender is made problematic within a fictive context. This double reading produces a dialectic effect, in that normative gender readings are subsumed by the fictive readings prompted by the work, while at the same time, our awareness of these drag strategies produces our understanding of the politics of the work. As such the effects of the playfully subversive take on gender identity function to defamiliarise the mechanisms of representation, foregrounding the theatre as a site of reflexive mediation.

The Reflexive Dramaturgy of Racial Drag

French's notion of 'racial drag' introduces another effective concept in the analysis of Sisters Grimm's work. For French, this is constituted not simply by the cross-racial casting strategies, but also through presenting ironically racist stereotypes. In doing so, Sisters Grimm "shows that normative understandings of racial identity are false stereotypes created by an inherently racist culture" (2017, p. 117). French's analysis is furthered here through an understanding of reflexive dramaturgy, which articulates the precise functioning of the spectator's inclusion in this dramaturgical strategy. The uncomfortable position this strategy puts the spectators in, where they are identifying with racist caricature, arguably de-stabilises the 'closed' perception of the fictive cosmos, wherein the sheer excess of racially stereotyped signs signals a critical attitude to their use. This perceptual encounter with the text's values indicates again how reflexive dramaturgies engender complex, multiple readings of text and fiction in performance.

The narrative in Act Two follows Moira eight years after the events of the first Act. She is now living in the town of Rabbit Flats in the Northern Territory, running a grocery business and, having invested the money from her one-off act of prostitution, a wealthy landowner. She employs an Aboriginal man, called Old Bill. This character is played by Chinese actor Felix Ching Ching Ho, who speaks in her own accent stereotypically 'native' lines like:

OLD BILL: You go to billabong and cool off, Miss Anna. You no see Boss Lady Moira today.

A similar language form is also used in Baz Lurhman's *Australia* for the voices of Aboriginal characters, particularly the young protagonist. It is, very blatantly, a caricature of Aboriginality. Aboriginality is a term that Mick Dodson problematises in a speech highlighting how the definitions of Aboriginality are constructed by the colonial, legal power and as such: "I cannot stand here, even as an Aboriginal person and say what Aboriginality is. To do so would be a violation of the right to self-determination and the right of peoples to establish their own identity. It would also be to fall into the trap of allowing Aboriginality to be another fixed category. And more than enough "fixing" has already occurred" (Dodson 1994). This 'fixing' of Aboriginality that Dodson refers to in a legal context has parallels in an artistic one. The phenomenon of Aboriginalism, a term similar to Edward Said's Orientalism¹⁷, describes the way in which Aboriginal culture is presented as incompatible with modern society in fiction, media and policy. It highlights how the characteristics of Aboriginality are effectively produced by the dominant white majority in these mediums. In *The Sovereign Wife*, however, the process of the production of Aboriginality is challenged and highlighted. It draws spectators' attention to these processes through a reflexive twist in the casting. Ching Ching Ho even speaks lines clearly meant to be exclusively heard by other Aboriginal characters in Cantonese. The

¹⁷ For Said, Orientalism was a way of articulating the terms of otherness as they are constructed by the white colonial, settler power. Aboriginalism functions similarly in an academic context to refer to the perceived traits and common representations of Aboriginal peoples as they are constructed by white Australia.

spectators, then, through this casting choice, are positioned to see the ‘othering’ of the Aboriginal subject, the excessive performance of Aboriginality, which means they can more easily discern and critique its use in the narrative. Further, by casting a young, female actor of Chinese heritage in this racially stereotypical role of the old, male Aboriginal tracker, Sisters Grimm are playing with ‘othering’ on multiple levels of identity - gender, ethnicity and age – parodying the construction of white settlers as the main subjects of the Australian experience. These techniques highlight entrenched attitudes to race, which are exposed as similar cultural formulations to gender, and reinforced by stereotype.



Figure 2. Paul Blenheim, Peter Paltos and Geneveive Guiffre. Photography by Claryssa Humennyj-Jameson.

While much has been written about how notions of performativity might directly connect to race¹⁸, Butler has largely critiqued this equivalency. For Butler, race is not simply another ‘ground’ on which theories of performativity can be located, but rather another field that might share some inter-sectionality. However, in *The Sovereign Wife*, racial drag utilises a subversive dialectic in a hyper-extensive way. A useful example of this comes in Act One, where an over-surplus of

¹⁸ See Inda (2000), Warren (2001) and Muñoz (2006).

particular racial signs serves to highlight what Edward Said called Orientalism. Utilising Michel Foucault's use of the term discourse, Said positions Orientalism as the ways in which the West "manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the Post-Enlightenment period" (Said 2014 ,p. 3). For Said, this systemic control of the Orient serves as a counterpoint to European experience, a way of effectively creating a permanent other. *The Sovereign Wife*, however, undercuts this production or management of the Oriental, ironically by producing it in extreme manifestations. For not only do we see the white Moira O Flaherty as the main character, which locates the story through a white perspective, but other races in the narrative appear as offensive grotesques. Kim Ka Yi, Moira's Chinese neighbour, is played by Peter Paltos, dressed in amateur theatre fake ponytail, moon covered costume and drooping moustache, who moves by shuffling his feet, his hands kept together in a prayer position in front of him (see Figure 2). He bows after every line. The representation is racist, it is offensive. It is however, the context of this caricature that provides the subversion, or, more than that, develops the spectators' encounter with the artifice of this representation.

It is here that it is possible to identify an highly specific mode of political critique emerging in contemporary Australian dramaturgies. Re-engineering his own work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Jacques Rancière argues for an "emancipated spectator" (2009, p. 1), a changing of the way we see the responsibility of the art-maker. He states that if one starts from the position that the spectator needs to be made active, one is already taking an unequal position in relation to them, one of the master. This is the trap these forms are at risk of, for by intending to expose a certain 'truth' about society or the need for change, it is necessary that this truth is taught to the audience. The expectation is that the audience come prepared to receive this truth, whereas in actuality, they have already received it, and are unwittingly only attending the work to confirm their pre-formed notions and attitudes. Rancière argues that this position is politically unviable. However, if one recognises that the spectator is an active participant in her own life, who can read and translate meaning according to her own experience, one starts on a

much more equal footing. The work does not need to teach, or make active, but instead acknowledges that the spectator will make her own way through the work, and that “interpreting the world is already a way of transforming it” (Rancière 2009).

Reflexivity as a dramaturgical strategy arguably opens up this altered mode of critique, one that disallows pre-formed notions and the position of master, or that plays within them in surprising ways. The key idea here is that of *inhabiting so as to critique*, a process of presenting, very closely, dominant discourses or ideas in their ultimate states, so as to challenge the audience with their entrenched problematic aspects, and even further than this, to confront the audience with their joyful and seductive qualities. For Žižek, this mode is most clearly identifiable in The Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup*:

[T]he powerful effect of *Duck Soup* does not reside in its mockery of the totalitarian state’s machinery and paraphernalia, but in openly displaying the madness, the “fun,” the cruel irony, which are already present in the totalitarian state. The Marx Brothers’ “carnival” is the carnival of totalitarianism itself. (Žižek 2009, p. 342)

Does not the same hold for the way in which *The Sovereign Wife* uses racial stereotypes? Sisters Grimm exploit the power inherent in stereotypical racial representations with a certain acerbic glee. This locates the audience in a difficult, and reflexive, situation when Kim Ka Yi states:

KIM: A thousand apologies. I am your Neighbour. Kim Ka Yi. I came to make my introduction - please.

MOIRA: Moira O’Flaherty, pleased to meet you. Kim, that’s a strange name. Where you hail from then, County Galway?

KIM: I am Chinaman, Mrs. O’Flaherty. I come from the Shee-wan-ping province, of China!

MOIRA: You don’t say. A real live Oriental, standing right in front of me?

I've only seen your kind in picture books. (Greene and Flanders 2013, p. 11)

The text's over-surplus of stereotypical racial language signals a critical attitude to their use; however, the comedy relies on our recognition of and investment in them. Whether or not the spectators are 'in on the joke', or find the representation offensive, they are nevertheless made aware of the stereotyping present in the representation and, as such, are more likely to engage with the politics of the work. This is a process that, to use Boenisch again, we can say functions reflexively, in that it has a double outcome that functions dialectically, a process that, for him, indicates that "the spectators' unifocal, singular central viewing perspective ... is effectively refracted" (Boenisch 2010, p. 164). The consequence of this refraction is where we can identify the political aspect of reflexive dramaturgy in *The Sovereign Wife*. For as a result of this dialectic engagement, the use of stereotype causes a more traumatic confrontation with the reality of these stereotypes and their effect, a lived political experience that we, as the audience, have to grapple with and make our own decisions about. It is interesting, in light of this, to note the reception of another Sisters Grimm work which also plays with racial stereotype, *Summertime In The Garden Of Eden*.

This race- and gender-bending restaging highlights the marginalisation of some of the characters in this antebellum genre, creating a sort of Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*. Genevieve Giuffre, a white actress, uses a black doll (and, at one point, a hammer) to portray *Mammy*, highlighting the ways in which black characters in this genre are robbed of agency and an authentic voice, becoming mere convenient tools and puppets of the white characters. (Macalister 2013)

What this critique misses is precisely the parallax aspect of this technique. Not only are we critically engaged by the use of racial stereotype, demonstrating the historical significance of such attitudes, we are also directly implicated by their re-use now. This is the achievement of reflexivity in Sisters Grimm's work, that we are made complicit through their inhabiting of historical (and contemporary) racism. And while the comparison to Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* in

Macalister's review is perceptive, the political functioning of the technique serves more to implicate than to de-familiarise. Rather, "a complex interference of representation and presence, perfectly symbolized in the parallax, emerges, and traditional representational closure makes way to a performative aperture" (Boenisch 2010, p. 171).

Žižek would describe the functioning of this technique as returning stereotype to its "pre-ideological state" (Fiennes 2006). Making reference to the German hard rock band Rammstein's use of Nazi and fascist aesthetic reference points, Žižek alludes to how these elements can be emptied of their formality and made subversive in their use. That is, it allows us (the audience) to enjoy them without the ideological framing of Nazism, which, for Žižek, constitutes a way of fighting the system from within. Boenisch describes Žižek's reading of cinema, music and art as having the potential to "reveal the true message of the symbolic and imaginary order, and [they] are thus akin to the psychoanalytic 'return of the repressed'" (Boenisch 2014a, p. 48). In other words, by reproducing elements of problematic or reprehensible aesthetics or attitudes in such a way that they are 'emptied' of ideological intent, we can effectively observe and neutralise them. Or, in presenting these reprehensible attitudes as part of the fabric of the work, we produce a traumatic encounter with the 'true' message of the symbolic and imaginary order of Australian identity. This advances the reading of Sisters Grimm's work, wherein we can see a similar process of 'emptying' occurring through the reflexive and parodist presentation of racist, sexist and homophobic images and language. For French, this is central to the political impact of *The Sovereign Wife*: "it is only by actively reproducing the stereotype and risking offending the audience that Sisters Grimm are able to undermine its power and critique the ongoing impact of such stereotypes on the construction of subjectivity" (2017, p. 134). Through a reflexive dramaturgy that disallows a closure of perception opposite these problematic representations, Sisters Grimm engender the spectator's subversive encounter with these values, encouraging a complex critical engagement that challenges dominant patriarchal and normative (white) Australia.

The audience's awareness of this satiric shifting of values hinges on another aspect of Sisters Grimm's practice that many critics have commented on: that of 'Camp' (Jefferson 2014)¹⁹. Camp, as a term in Queer theory, is highly contested for its usefulness to contemporary criticism, in that it can be said to emerge from what Andrew Ross calls a "survivalist culture" (Ross 1989, p. 323) rooted in the necessity for a secret mode of rebellion against oppression. Queercore filmmaker Bruce La Bruce, in a performance lecture at the Camp!Anti Camp conference at the Hebbel am Ufer Theatre in Berlin in 2012, notes the various forms into which Camp has mutated and rails against its co-option by contemporary culture, even stating that "'camp' has replaced 'irony' as the go-to sensibility in popular culture ... the whole goddamn world is camp!" (La Bruce 2014). However, John Wolf, in his article 'Resurrecting Camp: Rethinking the Queer Sensibility' (2013), resituates Camp in the domain of audience reception studies, describing camp as "a queer decoding strategy" (2013, p. 285) that functions as an alternative framework for reading content that re-codifies the original meaning. The new framework is that of Camp, a system that early Queer theorist Esther Newton describes in *Mother Camp* as "always involv(ing) a performer or performers and an audience" and as being "exaggerated, consciously 'stagey', specifically theatrical" (1972, p. 107). It is here that aspects of Camp can be applied to an analysis of *The Sovereign Wife's* dramaturgy, in that this re-codified reading is precisely the relationship Sisters Grimm are creating in relation to genre, Australian values and, importantly, text. Camp works only in this exchange between the work and the audience, and only then because of the way the material (content and style) of the work is being played with. The exchange here is one that Susan Sontag would refer to as being of the Camp sensibility:

Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in-objects and persona is to understand Being-as-playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre. (Sontag 1964)

¹⁹ This is a term used by multiple reviewers and by Sisters Grimm themselves in their promotional copy.

Camp in this sense implies a separation between the thing (object, person) and the performance of itself. An arch awareness of the thing's thingness. If we are to take a step further than simply noting how Camp as a sensibility exists in *The Sovereign Wife*, commenting on the featuring of sexuality, of drag, the juxtaposition of luxury and poverty, sacred and base, it should be acknowledged that this arch awareness is essential not only to the content, but also to the form of the performance. For is this separation not a parallel to the separation of actor and character? Or to the underlying mode of representation in theatre, in that we can say a lamp onstage is performing a lamp? For Lehmann, this is expressed through the idea that theatre is always semiotic, rather than mimetic; a lamp onstage is always a sign of a lamp, no matter how realistic (2006, p. 102). The degree to which this performance of itself is highlighted, or made ironic, differs in different forms. Camp, however, implies both an awareness of and a playful engagement, a highlighting of the separation between character and actor, or lamp and its meaning - the quotation mark that Sontag refers to. As Wolf notes, this is a game of knowledge and awareness in the audience, a process not only implemented by the artist. The link to reflexive dramaturgies here is clear, and provides an understanding of how Camp might be said to function in terms of the spectator. The spectator is watching the performance through quotation marks; the playful foregrounding of genre convention in the text, as well as an excessive performative style, includes the spectator in a process of active encounter.

The political impact of the Camp approach to text in Sisters Grimm's work is arguably best understood through the key theorist who has shaped modern understanding of this 'gap between' in a theatrical context, Bertolt Brecht. Ulrike Garde has previously pointed to the strength of his legacy in Australian work, and Hamilton, too, acknowledges his importance as an "aesthetic lineage" (2014, p. 522) to The Hayloft Project in particular. In *The Sovereign Wife*, while Brecht's techniques do not wholly describe Camp performance, his theories, particularly in relation to acting and character, form a historical background to the specific theatre vocabulary in *The Sovereign Wife*. For Benjamin, Brecht's Epic theatre "incessantly derives a lively and productive consciousness from the fact that it is theatre" (Benjamin 1988, p. 4). This provides a useful way of reading the

importance of exposing artificial mechanisms of theatre in Brecht's work, that "the stage is no longer 'the planks that signify the world'" (Benjamin 1988, p. 2) and instead an alternative relationship is formed between text and performance. One of the technical tenets that achieve this in Brecht's work is that the actor is conscious of the context of their actions; "the actor looks at himself" (in Martin and Bial 2000, p. 22). The actor's portrayal is canny to the art of itself, presenting an awareness that, ideally, creates a critical engagement from the audience. The audience, then, remains de-familiarised to the textual material, able to see the actions of a character in relation to the historical context of the work. They are, in a very specific way, made politically aware. The particularities of how this engagement is achieved are described by Brecht in his appreciation of the traditional Chinese acting style, *On Chinese Acting*: "The actor presents events of considerable passionateness, but his delivery remains unimpassioned" (Brecht in Martin and Bial 2000, p. 17). This parallax is intrinsic to Brecht's work. The simultaneity of passion and dispassion, flow and interruption, feeling and critical engagement, is the mode through which Brecht's politics function. It is the parallax that opens up this third awareness: a potential for change and action. The actor, in this way, "makes protest possible" (in Martin and Bial 2000, p. 22). In Camp performance, such as *The Sovereign Wife*, this functions in another way: it is not the dispassion that provokes critical engagement, but the very excess of passion that achieves it. Jill Dolan writes: "a materialist feminist critique can recuperate some of [Brecht's] theories to focus on representation's perpetuation of social relations of gender, race and sexuality, as well as class" (Dolan 1988, p. 107). This political recuperation, interestingly, is here achieved via a Camp aesthetic that is "traditionally apolitical" (McMahon 2006, p. 86). French has noted how "their performances employ a politicised camp sensibility to queer heteronormative and patriarchal culture" (2017, p. 115). The reflexive nature of Camp is employed to actively produce the interplay between text and performance. It makes every lamp a 'lamp'. In doing so, it highlights the mediation of the text in performance. Sisters Grimm's Brechtian DIY aesthetic foregrounds aesthetic processes of meaning making and includes the spectator in the process, encouraging a Camp viewing practice that is reflexively aware of performativity and mediation.



Figure 3: Eureka stockade. Photography by Claryssa Humennyj-Jameson.

Act Three: Form Shifts, into the Never Never!

At the end of Act Two, the painted backdrop of sky is dropped from the ceiling as Moira cries:

MOIRA: I won't rest until I bring my little girl home.

The set is deconstructed and, when we return to our seats, the stage is bare except for a projection screen that shows a pre-recorded video of Jason De Santis in the now familiar wig that signifies the character of Moira, running through the contemporary streets of Melbourne, past the National Gallery of Victoria, through the backstage at the MTC theatre and then bursting onto the Lawler Theatre stage. The logic of this final Act eschews the representational qualities of the previous two and emphasises the work first and foremost as a theatrical

construct. We are shown the bones of the theatrical mechanism itself, in that we see the dressing rooms backstage and the city that surrounds the work, which fractures our perception of the stage reality. This meta-theatrical breakdown is a repeated strategy across many Sisters Grimm works, wherein the theatrical language of the work is destroyed and re-oriented. For French, this dramaturgical strategy is the culmination of the social critique present across Sisters Grimm's other performative and textual strategies:

[A]s the theatrical apparatus disintegrates around them, the characters and the worlds they inhabit are shown to be propped up by the most flimsy of ideological structures. Thus Sisters Grimm challenge the racist, patriarchal and heteronormative fantasies that sustain the dominant order by depicting normative social worlds using non-normative stylistic and aesthetic techniques. (French 2017, p.121)

This breakdown, or meta-theatrical shift, stages a caesura in the stage's fictive cosmos, once again drawing attention to text as a construct within the theatre. For Lehmann this troubled mode of identification is termed the "irruption of the real"²⁰ (2006, p. 99), a conscious playing with theatre's dualistic semiotic form. This calls into question the privileged position of the fictive cosmos in dramatic work. Indeed, any use of techniques such as this rejects the very idea of the descriptor 'closed'. However, Moira's presence as a *character* in this real landscape fractures our perception even further, effectively casting the real outside world as the Never Never in the text. This suggests that this postdramatic technique is being re-doubled, and now included in recent dramaturgies as a way of expressing the dramatic content. As such, this feature of postdramatic theatre is here used as a further elucidation of the fictive, at the same time as being a renunciation of it. This simultaneity focuses our awareness

²⁰ Lehmann develops this term in relation to Lacan's understanding of The Real, a notion in Lacanian psychoanalysis, also built upon by Žižek, which describes the traumatic encounter with the truth of subjectivity. Thus Lehmann's usage of the term carries with it the sense that the breaking of theatre form and convention is also, somehow, traumatic, while still using 'real' as a reference to the perception of reality outside staged representation.

on the narrative of the text as something we are encountering through the performance, rather than the “assumption of a closed, unambiguous coherence” (Boenisch 2010, p. 172). This reflexive technique arguably exemplifies the playful development of dramatic fictive forms alongside postdramatic theatrical strategies that exists in recent examples of Australian performance. As the following Chapters will demonstrate, this reflexivity is characterised by a simultaneity that ruptures the dramatic material, yet nevertheless feeds back into its thematic concerns.

The final act of *The Sovereign Wife* follows Moira’s journey to find her missing daughter in the Never Never, an “imprecise locale that only exists in fiction or in the cultural imaginary, and is characterised as a remote uninhabited region of outback Australia” (Stadler and Mitchell 2010, p. 173). As a narrative driver, this region is typically an “indigenizing space” (Stadler and Mitchell 2010, p. 175) that acts as a catalyst for the main character’s internal change and brings around the end of the work. This formal device, also used by *The Sovereign Wife*, is used in a Camp mode, one that highlights the artificial qualities of itself as a cultural construct, questioning its place in the ‘cultural imaginary’. The idea of this magical other space having the power to profoundly affect the characters is a myth of Australian identity,²¹ one that the third act of *The Sovereign Wife* attacks by positing an alternate vision of what is really out there in the Never Never. In *The Sovereign Wife*, as opposed to *Australia*, it is not an “indigenizing space” at all, but a bush-doof²² rave party described in the stage directions of Act Three.

A soft but insistent beat is heard. It grows increasingly intense, until it evolves into a hard club beat.

Moira wakes up in a strange and wonderful place. A BUSH DOOF – pinging

²¹ If there is any doubt about the power of a film like *Australia* has over the presentation of Australian identity, we only have to look to the way in which the film was capitalised on in various state’s tourism campaigns, covered in detail by Stadler and Mitchell in their 2010 article ‘Never Never Land: affective landscapes, the touristic gaze and heterotopic space in *Australia*.’

²² “Bush-doof” is an Australian term for an outdoor rave party, often experienced under the influence of MDMA.

dickheads in fairy wings, Native American headdresses and neon “tribal” outfits everywhere.

She wanders through this cluster-fuck of banality, wide-eyed, in a state of pure wonder. Everywhere she goes people hug her, kiss her, hand her bottles of Mount Franklin water. (Greene and Flanders 2013, italics in original)

This is the “heart of Australia” (Greene and Flanders 2013), and the traumatic core towards which the narrative heads, upending the assumption about the indigenising qualities of the Never Never, and replacing it with a decidedly white, but non-specific, rave culture. The figures in this dreamscape are the characters from the play, re-inscribed into a contemporary context, all congratulating Moira on “giving up fighting” (Greene and Flanders 2013). ‘Giving up’ is conceived as the true spirit of Australian identity.



Figure 4. Act Three. Photography by Claryssa Humennyj-Jameson.

Formally, this moment is presented within an ironically postdramatic landscape. The actors no longer hold any sense of coherent representation of character; one is now a giant Koala, able to be tamed (à la Crocodile Dundee) by Old Bill’s nephew. The actors also form a more direct relationship with the audience;

when a song composed by the cast, “Glittering Gold”, is performed, the actors enter the audience bank and encourage us to sing along. Time shifts in the text are no longer marked by scene or costume changes; the text is simply acted out on a bare stage. There is a sense that the length of the show is the reason for this apparent abandonment of artifice. The ironic nature of this postdramatic landscape is complicated again, however, by the fact that its use is still framed by the narrative of the text as a dream or hallucination of the main character. This disallows the spectator to completely disregard the fictive cosmos the work is creating. Instead we are again positioned as watching ourselves watching (Boenisch 2014a, p. 50), in a dialectic loop created by the tension of the abandonment of the previous fictional representation. The spectator is reflexively included in the implications of the staging. This technique follows the logic of Camp, drag, engendering an ‘encounter’ with the text and its values, fracturing audience perception. But this playful rift between the text and staging is now extended to the more obvious meta-theatrical disintegration. It is only the text that continues in the previous mode, and as such we can see, more plainly than before, the text as a material construct, rather than something that is received uncritically. This mode in the work is reflected in the attitude the work has to the *idea* of Australian identity. Australianness is, in this way, presented as a form as well, one that can be similarly encountered, critiqued and contested.

Conclusion

By writing a text for theatre, that the production itself would critique and undermine, Sisters Grimm create an encounter with text, rather than simply its reception. In these ways, *The Sovereign Wife* develops what is posed, via Boenisch, as a reflexive dramaturgy. The encounter with text engendered by their use of textual material is augmented by their use of racial drag, which points to the constructed nature of gender and race through a white and racist lens, and through a layer of Camp awareness of artifice that foregrounds the aesthetics of representation. Their deployment of Camp can be elaborated on through Žižek’s concept of a parallax view, which describes a dual perspective,

one of both seriousness and humour, of contrast, a kind of 'bothness'. This Chapter also indicated the ways in which the use of racial stereotype in the work can be said to be politically viable, in that, through Žižek, one can arguably read it as a way of emptying the form of racism of its ideological intent. Finally, this Chapter outlined how what is usually understood as a postdramatic technique was re-imagined alongside a historically dramatic context, to achieve a simultaneous caesura that nevertheless fed back into the fictive cosmos of the work. This parallax re-doubling of techniques, historically understood as relating to separate modes of theatrical presentation, reveals the mode through which the mediation of text in contemporary Australian theatre works is made explicit.

The dramaturgy of this interplay between text and performance was present also in *The Rimming Club*, Sisters Grimm's work at TINA festival. It ended with the audience being given balls of newspaper to bombard the stage with, driving the actors away, exiling their clichéd drama from the stage. In the place of that drama in Sisters Grimm's work, however, a different, reflexive and intermedial dramaturgical mode for Australian theatre is developing. Building further on this Chapter's framing of reflexive dramaturgy, Chapter Three introduces how these dramaturgical treatments of text in Australian work relate to changing structures of authorship and the development of theatre-making strategies with text, most particularly in a main-stage context. This expands understanding of recent works to highlight the influence of collaboration in creating reflexive dramaturgies that emphasise the relationship between text and performance in production. By explicating this process, the question of textual dramaturgy's development beyond the term text-based theatre in an Australian context is defined further in response to a work that represents not only a noteworthy production in a main-stage Australian context, but a significant departure from the usual working practices of the artists involved.

Chapter Three: *Moving Target*

People assume he [Benedict Andrews] lives in isolation on a freezing volcanic island, dissecting 'Important German Theatre' in his lopapeysa whilst listening to ambient dub-step, writing poetry and playing with his hair. All of which is 100 per cent true.

(Hamish Michael, actor, in *TimeOut Sydney*, 2012)

The exaggerated image of Australian director Benedict Andrews as a kind of European hipster, while hilariously pilloried by actor Hamish Michael in the above quotation, nevertheless pervades critical responses to his work from his early residency at STC under Robyn Nevin to his most recent production in Australia, *Every Breath*. His work as a director has been maligned as “an example of a director establishing authority over a writer” (Nowra 2001) or even more stridently as “giving those who think Sydney’s theatre scene is being held hostage by auteur-wankers a clip full of told-you-so ammunition” (Blake 2013). The accusations of being an auteur, uninterested in the text beyond using it as material to stamp with his authority and ego, is a charge with which Andrews takes issue. In 2001, responding to playwright Louis Nowra’s piece deriding director’s theatre, he described this argument as “an alarmingly cynical view of the motivation behind the work of young artists and a shallow understanding of the reasons why a director might choose to engage with a classical text” (Andrews 2001). In an interview that I conducted with Andrews much later in 2010, and still subject to criticism for his approach to text, he stated that:

I have a great interest in language and writing so a lot of this stuff about the desecration of the text is a journalist version of wedge politics. It’s very dangerous because it assumes that, say Thomas [Ostermeier], Barrie [Kosky] and I, that we all only get out of bed to shock. Whereas actually I get out here at the end of the day exhausted from the thrill and fascination of working with actors on text following our particular fascinations in

what that text opens up.

(In Rogers 2010, p. 64)

This notion of following what text ‘opens up’ in performance indicates an approach in Andrews’ work that is not simply a process of illustrating the literary text. Andrews considers himself someone who works with text to “x-ray its insides and release its mysteries and demons. I try to explore (with and through the text)” (Andrews 2001). This *working with and through* is a contentious idea for critics of Andrews whose analysis is founded on the platonic ideal of a generating text that holds absolute authorial power. However, Andrews’ interest in text is expressed in a concrete engagement with the ideas inherent in the work’s theatrical form and language, rather than any traditional notions of literary, illustrative fidelity.

Building on Chapter Two’s use of reflexive dramaturgy to describe processes that stage the rift between text and performance, this Chapter links these strategies to the shifting nature of theatrical authorship that Duska Radosavljević describes in theatre-making practices. This is a shift of authorial authority that no longer demands a particular approach to the relationship between text and performance in theatre, instead opening up new modes of spectatorship through a shifted hierarchy in the rehearsal room that contests the logocentric position of the writer, and thus, conventional understandings of text-based theatre. It is important to note that Radosavljević’s concept significantly advances upon notions of devised theatre, to instead position the ways in which a theatre artist is a multi-professional “collaborating crafts person in the rehearsal room” (2013, p. 91). While Andrews, as shown above, typically works with classic texts, and usually acts as the sole director of his productions, *Moving Target*, Andrews’ collaboration with German playwright and dramaturg, Marius Von Mayenburg, represents a break from this pattern. I have chosen to focus on this work and its dramaturgy precisely for this reason - as the fact that the work resists neat categorisation as simply an example of text-based theatre, which the key artists involved in *Moving Target* have arguably staged previously (and since), provides clear insight into the difference between the processes of textual dramaturgy

that highlight the inherent mediation of text in theatre, and theatre that serves to illustrate a pre-written text. Focusing on *Moving Target*, as an outlier in both Andrews' and Mayenburg's oeuvre, presents an opportunity to expand upon the ways dramaturgies of text develop reflexive encounters with written material in performance, and emphasise how shifted notions of theatrical authorship and hierarchy contribute to this process. The fact that this work emerges through a "from scratch" (Mayenburg in Gallasch 2008, p. 13) collaboration of two significant international artists and was developed and presented in an Australian main-stage context also marks it as noteworthy, and makes it all the more imperative that my thesis engage with this work's approach to the mediation of text. As such, this Chapter argues that *Moving Target* developed a reflexive dramaturgical logic through the use of ritualistic game structures and the subjective splitting of narrative within the text itself, strategies which developed from a long form, theatre-making process with Andrews, Mayenburg and a company of six actors. In doing so, I position theatre-making and the position of the writer as a collaborating crafts-person in rehearsal as important aspects of recent directions in dramaturgy in Australia. This approach creates a medial interplay that shifts spectatorial awareness to their own contribution to the process of meaning-making on stage. In this way, the production foregrounds the medial labour of the performers and the spectators alike, exposing the medial processes of working with and through text.



Figure 5. Matthew Whittet in *Moving Target*. Photography by Tania Kelly.

Hide-and-Seek

Moving Target consists of a series of child-like games and gestures performed in a sterile closed white box, corresponding to a text by Mayenburg that “imagines a society where parents are scared of their children” (Gallasch 2008). The structure of the work is mainly built on the game of hide-and-seek; a performer counts to one hundred while the rest of the performers find places to hide in the small box-like set. Over the course of the work, the hiding becomes abstracted, instead of simply being out of sight, the game becomes more about transformations. The set consists of a red couch, a rug on the floor, a small table and three chairs, a sleeping bag and a few stuffed animals strewn about the dull white room. These materials are unstuffed, rolled up and completely estranged from their practical uses to create the ‘hiding spaces’ for the game. The theatrical language relies on invention and surprise within these limitations. The performers use their own names, although the text does not clearly define them

as separate identities.²³ They are instead the mouth-pieces, and victim/persecutors, of a narrative about a young child's sinister change of attitude.

Rob. I think her face has grown harder.

Rita. Has taken on a harder expression.

Rob. That's it.

Rita. Indicating an inner hardening.

Rob. Don't know.

Matt. You don't seem alarmed.

Rob. Alarmed?

(Mayenburg 2007, p. 2)

The actors, in speaking the text, form a kind of chorus or, as several reviewers noted, a "collective therapy session" (Hallett 2008) dealing with the changes in their children in conference with each other. Through this, they simultaneously relive and create the traumatised narrative of the work. For Andrews, the spectators watch the performers "produce her [the central child] as a narrative, you see this community producing a narrative" (Andrews in Copeland, 2008). The production of the narrative by the figures in the work is already suggestive of a mode of collective medial labour, as the therapy session is engaged in the active work of conjuring the child, a language game which implicitly includes the spectators as co-creators. Andrews suggests that the work explores "what it means to belong to a group" (in Copeland, 2008), already a central question of the theatrical situation itself that *Moving Target* makes a central feature of its form.

What eventuated as the theatrical form of *Moving Target* developed from an event that Mayenburg attended. A group of adults at a New Year's Party had

²³ The text I acquired from Malthouse Theatre Archives delineated the lines using the actors' names, whereas the eventual published version of the play from 2016 does not indicate how many actors should play the text, or which figure is speaking when. I have chosen to preserve the Malthouse Theatre version so as to highlight the personalisation of this text, and the way in which it developed directly in response to the original actors in the piece.

begun a game of hide and seek and turned off all the lights in a new apartment. At one point, the group locked one of the players in their hiding spot to the point where he began to cry (Gallasch 2008). The welling up of anxiety from this child's game became a strong starting point for Andrews and Mayenburg, as they took the game of hide and seek into the first development in Melbourne in 2006. The actors would improvise within a confined space, playing the game for up to three hours. For Mayenburg, this was central to the work's development; he describes how "the exhaustion of the actors in the workshop was important. Because only after you reach this kind of emptiness of total exhaustion, can you start to invent hiding spots in an empty room" (Mayenburg in Gallasch 2008). This exploration of their shared interest in the game of hide and seek then became material for the writing of a text, which Mayenburg describes as a "counterpoint to the game playing" (in Gallasch 2008). It is worth noting here that, from the beginning, the game was seen as a principal part of the work, not just as a tool to develop a text, but a score that the text would respond to as a 'counterpoint'. This shows how the relationship between text and performance was always conceived as equal in the process, and not a result of the need for "apparent padding" (Macmillan 2008) in the rehearsal room.

Responses to the work varied in attitude and, as with all of the works studied in this thesis, were primarily short-form reviews either in print or online. The central point of contention for many reviewers was the work's perceived pretension. *Australian Stage* described the work as "a drawn-out, self indulgent exercise in over intellectualizing theatre games" (Macmillan 2008). Bryce Hallet in the *Sydney Morning Herald* also noted that it seemed "pretentious in places" (Hallet 2008). Alison Croggon had a more mixed response, stating of the work "some sequences are sheer genius. And yet, frustratingly, it doesn't follow through the implications of its own process" (Croggon 2008). The positive responses mostly came from Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter from *RealTime* who also published an interview with Mayenburg. Perhaps surprisingly, *The Daily Telegraph's* Alex Lalak was also positive, describing it as "clever, courageous and inspiring theatre designed for an audience that is willing to let go and enjoy the ride" (2008).

Shifting Authorial Authority: Theatre-Making

As the product of a long-term collaboration, *Moving Target* represents, for Gallasch, “a potentially pivotal moment for Australian theatre, one that transcends nationalistic cultural borders” (2008). The relationship between Mayenburg and Andrews developed from Andrews’ time at the Schaubühne in Berlin in the mid-2000s, a theatre where Mayenburg is a resident dramaturg and now a director. Andrews had previously directed four of Mayenburg’s plays²⁴ in Australia and Germany, although this was the first time they had collaborated from the beginning of the writing process. Mayenburg, Andrews and designer Robert Cousins had also created a book of material, a mix of visual art, news stories, academic articles and photography. The books were then given out to the actors before development started (Andrews in Copeland, 2008). The idea was to use the structure of hide-and-seek to develop a theatrical language that responded to the ideas and thematics of the book, which Mayenburg would then use to write a text for performance. Even before analysis of the production’s particular strategies, examining the process the team set out for themselves makes it clear that the production is working in way that Duška Radosavljević describes as theatre-making, which finds parallels with what is often called devised theatre in an Australian context. However, Radosavljević’s understanding of this term develops from critic Lyn Gardner’s description of performers who make their own work rather than seek jobs through an agency as *theatre-makers*. Although she acknowledges the term also stems from earlier works in David Tushingham’s *Live* book series (1994), Radosavljević significantly expands upon these ideas to articulate a “multi-professionalisation” (2013 p. 53) of the theatre worker that is contributing to the changing relationship of text and performance in the 21st century, particularly acknowledging the aspects of works that “resist categorisation” by blurring the distinctions between received forms of staging new writing, re-imagining

²⁴ *Fireface* (2001) Sydney Theatre Company. *Eldorado* (2006) Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne. *The Ugly One* (2007) Schaubühne, Berlin. *The Dog, The Night and the Knife* (2008) Schaubühne, Berlin.

classics and ensemble devised work (Radosavljević 2013, p. 5). For her:

The notion of theatre-making implies a different model of the division of labour ... In theatre-making theatre creative process seems to be more important than the formal division of labour itself. (2013, p. 22).

Here, Radosavljević is not just repeating notions about devised theatre processes, but articulating a different kind of theatre worker, one who fulfils multiple roles in the creative process and whose work is made through an “ensemble way of working” (2013, p. 24). While *Moving Target's* process did have clearly delineated roles - director, playwright, designer and actors - Radosavljević's term extends to include “collaborative processes inherent to all theatre authorship and not exclusively devised theatre” (2013, p. 24). Her key insight for this thesis's understanding of the type of practice distinguishing recent dramaturgical approaches in Australia is the way in which she re-defines the theatre-making playwright as a “collaborating crafts person in the rehearsal room” and unpacks the “relevance of the playwright's kinaesthetic and musical sensibilities to the process of writing a play” (2013, p. 91). In *Moving Target*, the close collaborative nature of the process implies a room of crafts people, all exploring the same material. Mayenburg describes this impulse:

When we started, Benedict and me, we both wanted to start with nothing, from scratch. So we decided to just go into a rehearsal room with actors and see what happened. The only thing we knew that we wanted to try out was this game of hide-and-seek. (In Gallasch 2008)

Starting from scratch and *seeing what happened* are both indicators that the process of *Moving Target* relates more to a collaborative way of working than what is usually described as dramatic theatre's primary aim - serving the playwright's vision. Whose vision is being served in this case? While Andrews' work has been much criticised for the perception that he serves his own vision above the playwright's, here the playwright, director, designer and actors share that vision, and are simply seeing what happens with those ideas in the rehearsal

room. The fact that the process of making *Moving Target* deviates from both Andrews' and Mayenburg's usual modes of working makes the particular theatre-making strategies they used very clear by contrast. This was a work that was made from nothing, a text developed around a performative game, which in turn was used to stage that text. Admittedly this is not the first time a process like this has been undertaken in Australian theatre, but the main-stage context of this work and the departure from the artists typical modes of working mark it as significant.

This approach to text is also not necessarily new in an international context. However, Mayenburg's work as a playwright is considered a forerunner of a theatre that sought to challenge directors and invite collaboration. Like Andrews, Mayenburg has been misconstrued as pandering to the directorial desire for shock. Sanja Nikcevic traces New European Drama in relation to the rise of Regietheater in the 1970s and 80s. She characterises this period as a dark one for playwrights, with these directors "ruthlessly abolishing the usual components of the play itself" (2005, p. 255). Nikcevic, in clear opposition to director's theatre, identifies these components through an Aristotelian mode that privileges narrative and character. She then examines New European Drama as it was affected by the British In-Yer-Face playwrights²⁵ and their success in European theatres. She localises this movement of work as being related to Tony Blair's Cool Britannia, a fetishisation of Britishness in pop-culture that, for Nikcevic, extended to theatre. In wider Europe, works by In-Yer-Face writers have similar pop-cultural appeal, although Nikcevic notes that "the trend's acceptance and impact was most important in Germany, where young theatre people in the 'nineties gathered around Die Baracke, the small stage of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin" (2005, p. 261). For Nikcevic, this trend literally "produced" writers like Mayenburg, who was dramaturg at Die Baracke and had his first play staged there in 1996. Nikcevic's objection to the stylistic elements of

²⁵ In-Yer-Face Theatre was a term coined by British critic Aleks Sierz, who used it in relation to a broad group of (mostly British) playwrights who staged work in the 1990s that was perceived to be shocking, vulgar and violent. Key artists he identifies are Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Anthony Nielson. This term is contested by many of the playwrights themselves, and his book on the topic *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001) has been critiqued as an "over-simplification" (Brown 2001).

plays emerging in the 90s from Europe seems to be based on their use of violence and perceived lack of narrative structure. She is also critical of representing the “worst side of society” (2005, p. 264) as a valid leftist political strategy. Her evidence for the failure of these British and European plays from this period is typical of critics intent on reaffirming tried and true methods in that she bases her case primarily on their failure at the box office and instances of audience walk-outs. In one passage, she even attributes the success of playwrights Kane and Mayenburg to their individual, personal aesthetic styles, not theatrically, but in reference to their physical appearance as young writers. Kane was “all in black” (p. 266), and Mayenburg was “thin and pale” (p. 277). Her dismissal of writers like Mayenburg as products of a director-led trend, after which nothing new of value emerged, is, as David Lane describes in his work *Contemporary British Drama*, “a form of misdirection, a diversion from the more useful conversation about how the landscape may have changed over the last decade” (2010, p. 30). Lane’s work, by contrast, examines the legacy of this period as creating playwrights and theatre-makers interested in the nature of theatrical form and, even further, claims that:

The processes of creating and producing theatre that involves the writer as a collaborating artist, or a structuring force behind a collage of raw materials (among many other possible roles) are filtering into the mainstream, challenging our perception of drama simply being the realization of a writer’s singular vision. (Lane 2010, p. 30)

It is here, in this context, that *Moving Target* should be read. Mayenburg is, along with all the other artists and performers, a “structuring force” for the production. Lane provides a useful starting point for reading this influence on new writing as not “devalue(ing)” (2010, p. 104) the text but encouraging innovation in its use. In this sense, Mayenburg, as the playwright of *Moving Target*, should be seen as a key collaborator rather than the sole generator of material. Rather than all elements coalescing to support the vision of the playwright, in *Moving Target* the vision for the work is shared across all the roles. Radosavjlevic goes further than this in her analysis of the changing relationship between text and performance,

highlighting the idea of a “shared interest” between director and playwright that “relinquishes the position of authority in favour of collaboration” (2013, p. 116). This is a significant departure from modern dramatic theatre that is based on conceptualising a singular vision. The director, performers, designers and playwright of *Moving Target* are all structuring forces of a governing collective interest, rather than embodiments of a singular vision, be this directorial or literary.

The way in which this changing mode of authorship re-frames the relationship between text and performance opens up space for us to re-consider text as one of the strategies of expression within theatre and not a genre of performance itself. Lehmann identifies this when he describes how “once the formerly ‘glued together’ aspects of language and body separate in theatre ... new representational chances come about through the autonomization of the individual layers” (2006 p. 51). Lehmann’s observation is necessary to understand the profound shift that postdramatic techniques represent for the way dramatic practice has traditionally been conceptualised historically. However, in *Moving Target*, it is clear that Andrews and Mayenburg considered the writing and performance to be intertwined from the beginning of the process and not entirely autonomous as such, and developed them simultaneously through relational counterpoint. The effect here is arguably a different type of ‘gluing together’ of the theatrical layers or, to be more precise, a ‘re-gluing together’. In *Moving Target*, the contrapuntal relationship between text and performance indicates what Radosavljević calls a “shared interest” between makers, and as such reading the role of the text as somehow being imbued with compositional authority is impossible. The text and staging are interrelated as textures within the production, yet separate enough to be identifiable. This dualistic quality of the text and production in *Moving Target* suggests that the medial labour of spectatorship is also a key consequence of this shared mode of making. In a similar fashion to *The Sovereign Wife*, the transmission between text and performance in *Moving Target* produces a form of reflexive non-closure that implicates the spectators’ involvement in the processes of representation. They see the way the text is being mediated in the moment of performance. This

quality of the text is, as pointed to in Chapter Two's analysis of *The Sovereign Wife*, a core feature of reflexive dramaturgies. *Moving Target* differs, however, in that, where *The Sovereign Wife*'s creative team wrote a text in order to subvert and critique that text in production, *Moving Target*'s text emerges from the development of a particular staging strategy, which in turn was implemented in staging the text. I do not note the connection between these two works so as to reduce their complex and individual dramaturgical underpinning. My intent is to highlight that while these two pieces utilise antithetical performative strategies, it is significant that they both emerge from a reconceptualised use of postdramatic strategies relating to rupture and caesura alongside the use of dramatic text's fictive cosmos. The redefinition of theatrical authorship implicit in this idea is furthered by Boenisch and Radosavljević's work, but, significantly, by approaching theatrical authorship from the perspective of the text, rather than that of the director or collaborating artist, this thesis advances an understanding of dramaturgies that embed reflexivity and foreground the present quality of the text *as a media object* through the text itself, instead of solely the way text is treated in production.

Reflexivity, Game Structures and 'Play': Generating Two Texts

Yeah and there were two separate texts there. A complete text based on improvisations, the 1 2 3 4 5 in the corner, a wordless text that was very rich and spontaneous and we worked a lot of time on that. And then Marius' text written for the actors meshing over that. (Andrews in Rogers 2010)

In an interview I undertook with Andrews, he notes that he considers *Moving Target* to have "two texts": Mayenburg's text, the narrative played out by the performers but also the text of the games themselves. This semiological use of the term text, to indicate the sign system enacted in the work's staging, indicates

a dialectical thinking on Andrews' part. By distinguishing between the written text and the scenic (game) text of *Moving Target*, Andrews makes clear the interwoven nature of the relationship between text and production. What he describes as the "meshing" of these two texts provides a useful way of extending this thesis's understanding of reflexive dramaturgies in an Australian context. By investigating the functioning of game structures in *Moving Target*, this thesis identifies how these formal modes govern spectator response and produce, in their dialectic relationship, a compositional aesthetic that opens up space for the audience to read multiple meanings into the performance.

In defining how the game of hide-and-seek functions in *Moving Target*, one should first understand it as an example of active play, not only in the childlike sense (although it would seem to point to that reading) but in the Schillerian sense as described in the introduction to this thesis. The 'play' that is a precise indication of the mediation of opposing poles: representation and production, performance and presence, fictive and non-fictive, real and unreal. The game of hide-and-seek in *Moving Target* takes on these qualities, providing a developing aesthetic counterpoint to Mayenburg's text but also enacting its own mediation of space, fiction and narrative. The game itself is 'readable' for a spectator as it follows a structure: a performer counts to one hundred, the others hide themselves, the first performer searches for them, naming them as they are found. The inherent drama in this infinitely repeatable game is played out in ways that highlight the performative qualities of 'hiding'. The actor counting is witness only to the product of the hiding process, whereas the spectator witnesses the production of this new space as we see the actors hide themselves. The tension between what is seen by the performers and what is seen by the spectator highlights this play. The spectators are implicated in the game. As such, hide-and-seek takes on a structuring role in the theatrical production, and it is in this sense that we can consider it a kind of scenic 'text'.

A useful concurrent example to help illustrate this point is the work of Sheffield based performance group Forced Entertainment. Their use of game structures or formal framing of text in their over twenty five-year history has continued in

their most recent works' engagement with durational aesthetics. Their half written, half-improvised works such as *And On The Thousandth Night*, *Quizoola* and *Speak Bitterness* play out over twenty four hours and have been live-streamed to invite online as well as in-theatre responses. Each of these works is governed by a formal game that guides the improvisations and pre-written material. In *And On The Thousandth Night*, the performers tell stories that begin with 'Once upon a time ...'; they must continue their story until another performer says 'stop' and begins their own. In *Quizoola*, one performer reads from a huge list of questions, personal and political, and another performer answers them as best they can. In *Speak Bitterness*, the cast read from an enormous list of confessions all beginning with the word 'we'. The simple formal features of each production belie the complex relationship that these features produce in repetition. The spectators become attuned to the game, and as such are watching for development, for contrast and play within the structure that has been set up.

In *Moving Target*, too, hide-and-seek provides a structure that the spectator watches develop through repetition and a constant re-ordering of reality. Mayenburg, in his introduction to Andrews' recent collection of plays, writes of this playful aspect of their production:

In 2008 we were in wintery Melbourne in order to work on our joint production, *Moving Target*. Here, as with all his shows, Andrews filled the rehearsal space, an abandoned church, with his own language, his own sense of humour, his own code, which infuses the banalities of the everyday with meaning and casts them into a light which makes them unfamiliar, as if you are seeing for the first time. The actor who hides under the table becomes an ironic sculpture, the whole space becomes a sinister crime scene, it is an infectious transformation of reality that becomes addictive once you have taken part in it. (Mayenburg in Andrews 2016, p. 10)

As in Forced Entertainment's works, the banalities of the game structure become

re-imbued with meaning in *Moving Target*. They re-orient their original function through repetition and alternative emphasis. For Mayenburg, this is to “see ... with the eyes of an alien” (in Andrews 2016, p. 10), a characteristic he identifies in Andrews’ work more broadly. It is also worth noting that Mayenburg characterises Andrews as having ‘his own language’ of performance in rehearsal, and, in referring to a ‘language’ in this context, Mayenburg further complicates the notion of a singular author as in theatre-making strategies previously discussed. It is clear that this ‘joint’ production is written in counterpoint, and Mayenburg’s written text is one part of the dialectic and reflexive relationship playing out in the work.

To delve further into what is meant by the formal structuring force of a game in theatre, and how this produces reflexivity in *Moving Target*, I utilise philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of an *apparatus*. Agamben develops his understanding of the term *apparatus* from Michel Foucault’s use of the word *dispositif*. Agamben’s thesis is that, more than just being a simple descriptor, the word “is a decisive technical term in Foucault’s thought” (Agamben 2009, p. 1). He uses Foucault’s foundational term, tracing its etymology and contextualising it through his own study of the history of Christian theology, and finds in it its “*Entwicklungsfähigkeit* (literally, capacity to be developed)” (Agamben 2009, p. 13). For Agamben, then, the apparatus is “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (2009, p. 14). It is a “thoroughly heterogeneous set of devices” (Foucault in Agamben 2009, p. 2) which function separately to living beings, and which are instruments of power, delineating and structuring human thought. They work, despite their independence from living beings, to “imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce their subject” (2009, p. 11). The apparatuses, as separate entities exerting power over humans, define both the living subjectivity of those caught within them, and the process of their de-subjectification (Agamben 2009, p. 20). To explain this duplicity, Agamben speaks disparagingly of the mobile telephone user who is defined in relation to the device, which, far from being a tool used by the subject, defines the individual as a subject through their

gestures and relation to the world, and simultaneously delineates the numbers through which they can be controlled and de-subjectified (Agamben 2009, p. 21). This is the seductive and dangerous nature of the apparatus, and also its economic-political implications, in that, as Agamben suggests, “the extreme phase of capitalist development in which we live [is] a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses” (2009, p. 15). By their mass distribution, we can recognise that Agamben considers the apparatus not only as a wide network of control, but also having to do with objects and rules on a smaller scale.

Huw Griffiths has also pointed to the influence of Agamben and Foucault on Andrews’ work, arguing that they form “theoretical touchstones” (Griffiths 2013, p. 92) for *The War of the Roses* - Andrews’ and adaptor Tom Wright’s eight hour-long version of Shakespeare’s history cycle, staged at the Sydney Theatre Company in early 2009. Griffiths argues that the Brechtian relationship to *pathos* in the work was not, as in these practices and methods, aimed at providing a Marxist critical reading. Rather, those same techniques - titling, gestic acting - were employed to create focus on what Agamben terms biopolitics, the impact that sovereign power has on bodies that are made abject by being external to law (Griffiths 2013, p. 94). However, more specifically, Agamben’s use of the term apparatus provides a way of reading the overarching theatrical devices Andrews employs in his productions, as they are, as any apparatus must be, one of the main modes through which the spectators’ thoughts are oriented. In *Moving Target*, the text and the game structure of hide-and-seek serve to control the performers and manipulate the way the audience view the work, and can be understood as apparatuses in Agamben’s terms. The game of hide-and-seek and Mayenburg’s responding play-text form the two texts, or two apparatuses, that orient the world of the work for the spectator. These structures position the spectator in relation to the fictive in a way that does not solely rely on the representational, but instead highlights the dialectic gaps and tensions between the stage images and the narrational movement of the play. A particular moment that serves to illustrate this tension is the final third of the work. This section, much maligned in reviews, abandons the hide-and-seek formula and finds other imagistic modes to accompany the writing. Croggon notes the way that this shift

depends the way the work has, until then, functioned:

It occurs to me that the central problem is that there are two possible artworks uncomfortably jostling in this show. They run parallel for some time - until quite close to the end, in fact - but then find themselves sadly at odds. The first is the work in which the text is integrated with the performances, in which gesture and word, physical games and language, are each relating freely. While this is happening, it is tremendously exciting theatre. But towards the end, the writing asserts its dominance and narrative becomes the controlling impulse of the theatre. And at this point the energy whooshes out of the whole thing. (Croggon 2008)

Croggon's observation critiques the dramaturgy of focusing on the narrative in the final third of the work. This is noteworthy because the staging itself does not suddenly shift to a representational mode at this point; the images and stage language remain playfully at odds with the narrative in the text. Croggon does not specify what constitutes the assertion of dominance by the writing, but I speculate that she is referring to the narrational movement of the text itself towards a conclusion. It moves towards a final image; the little girl at the centre of the story is shot in the carpark as she walks to put a dead bird in a shoebox in a public garbage bin. The energy of the text accelerates to this point, as in dramatic writing that works towards a climax. This is matched, somewhat, by the shifting energy of the staging. Without the game of hide-and-seek, the staging becomes faster, more frenetic and active, with less time for pause. Croggon, however, locates the fault within the "self-indulgent" (Croggon 2008) staging rather than in the text itself.

This points to a hierarchical understanding of the elements of the performance that the work itself does not engage in. What Croggon is perhaps referring to is the expectation of a dramatic conclusion in the spectators, the anticipation of a conventionally satisfying narrative, which the game structures in the first two thirds of the piece were not suggestive of. But what Croggon perceives as a departure from the integration of text and performance relies on reading the text

and performance as 'unglued' entities, an approach that, as I have explored above, Andrews and Mayenburg cannot be said to be engaging in. As such, reading the last third of the work as somehow un-integrated overlooks the collaborative theatre-making process Andrews and Mayenburg engaged in to make the work. Whether this shift was effective theatrically is of course subjective, but the notion that there are 'two artworks jostling' in the work avoids the properly reflexive functioning of these moments as they were built into the performance. As the game structures fall away, the spectators are left with images and text that signal themselves as being related to the fictive, while still separate from them. The final image is this: the room has been filled with masking tape strips that criss-cross the space from floor to ceiling like a kind of spider web. The actor Alison Bell sits centre; the others are hiding again. Alone, she describes a bird flying into the glass window of her apartment and how she cared for it. Then, one day she came home to find the bird torn apart. The show ends with her saying she's still waiting for the cat who did it to come home. An air of menace and desperation hangs over the stage. In this moment the two texts in the work are separate, but just as contrapuntally related as the first two thirds of the work. In this moment, as when the hide-and-seek game was included, the foregrounding of medial labour in the image of Alison Bell, the text and the masking tape, encourages spectators to fill in the gap between text and performance. As such, when read as an example of reflexive dramaturgy – rather than as a failed experiment - *Moving Target* provides a fascinating insight into how theatre-making processes can generate complex, dialectic relationships between text and performance. Even when the text and performance have been generated in the same room.



Figure 6. Photography by Tania Kelly.

Conclusion

Pavis describes the search for a definitive typology of dramatic texts as “a question as vain as it is desperate” (2016, p. 321), stressing instead the importance of understanding how text is being used in theatre. In this example, a collaborative process produces an ‘open’ text that still utilises the construction of a fictive cosmos, the disavowal of which was a key tenet of postdramatic theatre. The complex simultaneity of elements produced collaboratively in *Moving Target* suggests that this is partly the result of changing modes of authorship in contemporary theatre, which recast traditionally delineated roles as equal ‘structuring forces’ in a rehearsal room. *Moving Target* provides an example of a work wherein the text and performance have been developed in tandem, but, rather than being either illustrative or deconstructed, the performance and text sit in counterpoint, reflexively commenting on or contradicting each other, while at the same time forming a guiding thematic link between the narrative and staging. These techniques, both onstage and in the writing, are reflexive strategies that functioned to ‘open-up’ the relationship between the play-text and the performance-text. Andrews’ term for his dramaturgy, “opening up” text,

echoes Boenisch's reference to dramaturgies that avoid the "closure of spectator perception", explored in Chapter Two. And, as in *The Sovereign Wife*, what this opening achieves is the 'making present' of text as a media, engendering the text's encounter with the spectator, a surface able to be identified and responded to critically as a texture in performance, rather than simply being received. As I describe in the introduction to this thesis, this process is also an intermedial one, not as it refers to the inclusion of digital media in performance, but as it draws attention to the inherent *a priori* quality of text being transmitted in the theatre medium. In the next Chapter, this intermedial process of 'opening' will be highlighted through an analysis of my own work *Tom William Mitchell*, which further explores the foregrounding of *medial transmission* as a key aspect of creating an encounter with text that produces reflexive dramaturgy, providing an exegetical account of my own practical exploration of the concepts I develop throughout my analysis.

The *Regie* of Benedict Andrews is now focused mostly on classic dramatic texts and operas that he stages at international theatres - *King Lear* for the National Theatre of Iceland, *A Streetcar Named Desire* for Young Vic, London and St. Anns Warehouse, New York - and also on film projects; he has recently directed a film adaptation of David Harrower's play *Blackbird*, retitled *Una*, featuring Ben Mendelsohn and Rooney Mara. In recent years, Andrews has also turned to playwrighting. His "overwrought, hamfisted, career-killing play at Sydney's Belvoir St theatre" (Bradford-Syke 2012), *Every Breath*, was slammed by critics but his recent work, *Gloria*, for Griffin Theatre Company was lauded as "dazzling" and "sharp and uncompromisingly intelligent" (Tongue 2017). While his merits as a playwright are not the focus of this thesis, in light of the stereotypical characterisation of Andrews as a proponent of the text-destroying directors' theatre, it is significant that he himself has a practice as a writer. This is suggestive that his core interest is, as Croggon identifies, text and language and how they can be made to live on stage. He makes reflexive works that include their audience and become 'live' through a complex dialectic between stage and audience. In his words:

The theatre's not up here or here, it's made somewhere in this space between these two bodies, between these two chambers. I always think the theatre is then made in the air between the two things, it's not just in the watching, it's made hovering in the air between the stage and the audience. (Andrews in Rogers 2010)

In *Moving Target*, Andrews and Mayenburg's collaborative process implicitly led to a reflexive interplay between text and performance, refusing to provide closure of either the fictive cosmos or spectator perception by constantly upending and re-inventing the rules of the game. In this way, the theatre is kept 'hovering' between the stage and audience, a properly play(full) and dialectic relationship. The significance of the playwright as a structuring force and collaborating crafts-person in the rehearsal room should not be underestimated. As will be demonstrated in later chapters of this thesis, works in radically different forms all feature collaborative making in their processes, opening up the text and ideas to multiprofessional making environments that highlight processes of medial transmission and labour – in the sense that both the performers and spectators are *working* to produce the representation of the text. Further, the formal inventiveness and play that result from these processes showcase a returned focus on the possibilities of text in Australian theatre, a compositional approach that signifies a marked shift beyond the notion of text-based theatre. The following Chapter provides an example of the practical application of medial transmission in theatre-making practices through an account of my own process as a writer/director. In doing so, this thesis develops intermediality as an inherent aspect of the theatre situation and outlines the ways in which this is being foregrounded by contemporary artists interested in collaboration, reflexivity and play.

Chapter Four:

Tom William Mitchell



Figure 7. Photography by Carly Young.

This project is driven by a research question that emerges from my experience of performances that cannot be reduced to the idea of text-based theatre. My practical project, *Tom William Mitchell* – a new text and theatre work that I have written and directed, represents another angle from which to interrogate this question and unpack the complex interplay between text and performance in works that highlight medial transmission. As such, this work extends my thesis's case studies to include *Tom William Mitchell* as a performance-as-research (PAR) project that explores the fundamental dilemma at the heart of my research question – how are artists departing from a model of staging text that implies that theatre serves to illustrate text? In doing so, I further advance this thesis's treatment of intermediality in relation to textual material in theatre. To explore these concepts, *Tom William Mitchell* engaged with intermedial strategies in ways that aimed to expand upon Chapple and Kattenbelt's understanding of the term, as well as develop practical strategies for creating reflexive dramaturgies

in both the text and staging. By employing Boenisch's thinking on the dialectical foregrounding of medial processes in contemporary theatre, and building on Hamilton's conception of theatre as a *hyper*-medium in relation to concurrent examples of Australian work, this Chapter argues that a foregrounding of intermediality contributes to recent Australian dramaturgy's complex engagement with fictive and non-fictive devices, and creates a mode of spectating that is critical and politically engaged. The layers of different media in *Tom William Mitchell* will be termed as *identifiable surfaces in the work* by developing Lehmann's description of dramaturgical architecture. This allows for a conceptualisation of the dialectical and parallax interplay between spoken text and projected text, live-video, performance and screenplay form in *Tom William Mitchell*.

Chapple and Kattenbelt's definition of intermediality assumes "that a significant feature of contemporary theatre is the incorporation of digital technology into theatre practice, and the presence of other media in theatre productions" (2006, p. 11) and, as such, declares that "intermediality is associated with the blurring of generic boundaries, crossover and hybrid performances, intertextuality, intermediality, hypermediality and a self-conscious reflexivity that displays the devices of performance in performance" (2006, p. 11). Their understanding of intermediality here touches on many qualities of recent Australian dramaturgies that this thesis has already explored. It is suggestive of the slippages of genre and intertextual references in Sisters Grimm's works, particularly the inclusion of video and projection in *The Sovereign Wife's* third act. It also touches on the reflexive strategy of exposing the mechanisms of theatre within theatre, a consequence of the ritualised games in *Moving Target*. I have chosen to develop their ideas in this Chapter in particular, however, as the theatricality of *Tom William Mitchell* utilises a multi-media environment to stage the text more overtly than the other works this thesis focuses on. By exploring reflexivity, intermediality and medial transmission through a PAR project that directly incorporates multiple modes of mediation (text, performance, live-film, text-on screen), the problem of text-based theatre as terminology to describe dramaturgy is further explicated. Meyrick highlights how, in thinking through

PAR projects, the French sociologist Michel Wievorka's work provides a framework for "how referent and conceptual schema are brought together so as to be adequate to each other" (Meyrick 2014a) in case-study methodology. The confluence of practical work and scholarly framework for understanding and reading that work, while providing clarity of intent for the researcher, opens up PAR to be responsive to the organic development of the project. Meyrick describes the "considerable diversity of starting point and interpretive route" of the "flexible" (2014a) case study. As such, PAR entails experimentation and a certain level of unknown results, which the researcher must contextualise. To this end, this Chapter constructs what Meyrick calls a "broader intellectual vista" (2014a) consisting of excerpts from the play-text, digital documentation, accounts of rehearsal and development, insight into the creative thinking behind design and structural decisions and a guided account of my approach to provide this contextualisation. It is important to note, of course, that I do not intend to frame *Tom William Mitchell* as somehow entirely representative of the dramaturgical concepts I am exploring, but instead emphasise the project as an experimentation with concepts that I develop throughout my thesis. If, as creative arts researcher Dennis Strand suggests, PAR occurs when "a production becomes an intervention in an established scholarly debate, dialogue or discourse" (Strand 1998, p. 89), *Tom William Mitchell* is not so much an intervention as an experiment with the potential practical application of these concepts. However, via Meyrick, this nevertheless constitutes a valid way of contributing to the scholarly field through PAR.

The play-script of *Tom William Mitchell* is provided in the appendices of this thesis, along with a digital-recording of the production. *Tom William Mitchell* is a satirical rise-and-fall narrative of an individual in a news-media organisation, intended to stage the way in which institutional power co-opts the strategies of those who would dissent against them and to explore the rise of contemporary populism. After a grueling interview for a job at UBS news network, ex-*Australian Survivor* contestant Tom Mitchell catches the eye of executive producer Aidie with a speech about the death of TV news. She employs him but, when a more experienced anchor ridicules him, his livid on-air reaction and

defense of alcoholic celebrity Wendy Thrace get him fired. A disappointed Aidie goads him into live-streaming the news of his dismissal online, which pressures the news network into re-instating him, due to his huge popularity with viewers. Tom then appears on a Q and A panel show, half-heartedly contributing to the debate before a rogue audience member turns the panel session into a hostage situation. Tom talks down the bomber by espousing his personal philosophy: “do nothing”, an approach to the disintegration of capitalism by amplifying its worst excesses until revolt becomes inevitable. Tom’s popularity grows but he is sued in court for inciting a riot during his appearance on Q and A, and is banned by the Network head from appearing on TV. He begins an intimate relationship with Aidie. Using privileged knowledge he has about a prominent politician’s sexual escapades, Tom manoeuvres himself back onto the air, ostensibly to reveal this salacious information during an on-air interview. Instead, Tom publicly champions the politician’s anti-climate change policies. The interview devolves into a fight between the politician and his accuser. At a nightclub later that night, Tom meets Wendy Thrace again, the celebrity he once defended. At home with Aidie, he explains that he championed the anti-climate change cause because it “hastens the coming change”. The next day at the news network, Tom meets the CEO of the company, who brings him into a strange blue room. The CEO explains that the room houses “the market” and that the market exists as a quasi-supernatural force that sustains all life on planet earth. The CEO wants Tom to proselytise this message and, when Tom touches the market, he is fundamentally changed. He convinces Aidie to let him on-air one last time and uses the opportunity to propose marriage to Wendy Thrace, brutally ending his relationship with Aidie and creating a huge media sensation. Guided by the Network CEO and buoyed by his popularity following the proposal, Tom branches out into politics, announcing his candidacy with a speech promising to find out “how bad it can get”, pushing capitalism to breaking point.

The narrative moves forward in time to track a populace devastated by his policies, yet still convinced of the validity of the “coming change”. Tom himself is unhappy at the top, living on a cruise ship in the middle of the ocean with Thrace, whose alcoholism has been given free reign. The ship is attacked by terrorists,

who declare themselves disciples of Tom and want to kill him as a way of preventing the coming change. Wendy is killed and he is made to walk to the plank. The narrative ends on the pacific ocean trash vortex, an island of garbage, where Tom, now profoundly mad, tries to convince the woman who lives on the island to sail all the garbage back to the mainland. The woman describes the simple pleasure of a sunrise, before expressing that she is glad she has “something to eat”. The play ends as she walks towards Tom, holding a baseball bat.

Development Process

Tom William Mitchell is a play-text that I developed over three years: 2014-2017. Initially, I had been writing short scenes that could have been job interviews, intrigued by the dynamics of power particular to that social situation. Several of these are now central scenes in *Tom William Mitchell*. This early writing was inspired by the Paddy Chayefsky and Sidney Lumet film *Network* (1976). I was attracted to this film first because of its incendiary and theatrical use of language, the famous “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore”. But upon reading along with the screenplay, I also became fascinated with the way the satirical nature of the film was ‘built in’ to the screenplay document. I was analysing the transmission of the screenplay media, into the medium of film, the way not just the dialogue, but the log-lines and action paragraphs fed into the film making. I was, in this way, becoming aware in a different form of how the medial transmission of text to performance might work. The fact that this approach was simultaneously playing out a narrative that also dealt with the way meaning is transmitted, media to media via television news, made this an incredibly rich and complex experience that I wanted to explore with my own writing. The ‘job interview’ texts were the starting point for this, introducing a character, ‘Tom’, that was undergoing several strange and confronting interviews for a position at a TV news network.

I was also writing in response to the 1957 film *A Face in the Crowd* written by Budd Schulberg and directed by Elia Kazan, considered a precursor to *Network*.

This film, featuring an early performance from actor and sit-com star Andy Griffiths, follows a more archetypal rise-and-fall structure than *Network*, but features a similar satirical edge. It focuses on Lonesome Rhodes, a drifter who becomes a populist puppet for the corporate and political interests of a TV network before being taken down by an on-air blunder. Not aware that his mic is still live, Lonesome castigates his adoring viewers:

“Those morons out there ... you know what the public's like? — a cage full of guinea pigs ... good night, you stupid idiots, good night, you miserable slobs. They're a lot of trained seals — I toss them a dead fish and they'll flap their flippers.”

(*A Face in the Crowd*, 1957)

Both films focus on a charismatic outsider who makes it big in TV. In doing so, they stage how systemic power co-opts the strategies of those who would dissent against it. This political observation in the films was also something I responded strongly to. Fascinated by these two films, I began working with University of Wollongong actors and technicians on scenes straight from their screenplays, alongside my own ‘job interview’ material – a similar ‘from scratch’ process to that adopted for *Moving Target*. We discovered that, for us, something ‘live to air’ going horribly wrong was an effective, satirical strategy that we wanted to explore further. From there, I knew I wanted to write a piece that exploited that device, and bring to a contemporary audience the themes that resonate so powerfully in *A Face in the Crowd* and *Network*, updated for our contemporary political moment.

During early development of the work, Solomon Thomas (cast member and video designer) remarked that if I really wanted to push the textual form of theatre and respond to both films, I should write the text for performance using the conventions of a screenplay. I felt that this approach would be an experiment with how my narrative could be communicated through a different medium. I also noted that this process of re-mediating texts in theatre was a strategy of many international works pertinent to my research - Ivo Van Hove has even

recently staged an adaptation of the film *Network* at the National Theatre in London, starring *Breaking Bad* actor Bryan Cranston as Howard Beale. I became fixated on the idea that perhaps, by writing the narrative in the visual form of a screenplay, I would ensure that the text would be experienced as a *surface* within the production. I advance this concept in relation to Lehmann's understanding of the changed nature of theatrical sign systems from dramatic theatre to postdramatic theatre. His concept helps articulate the interplay of multiple media in *Tom William Mitchell*, and echoes the function of medial transmission as manufacturing an encounter with text in the other chosen case studies.

Media Surfaces

Lehmann points to the layered nature of different semiotic texts in dramatic theatre: the *linguistic text*, the *text of the staging and mise en scene* and also the *performance text* (Lehmann 2006, p. 85). In doing so, he points to the logocentrism of this model, which, for him, privileges not only the word, but structure and order. He describes how the linguistic text exists as privileged within the architecture of dramatic theatre. This term does not refer to the design of the physical buildings in which the dramatic text plays out, but to the experiential construction of meaning within performance, its dramaturgic architecture. He notes, however, that in postdramatic theatre this architecture has shifted from one that strives for hierarchical unity, into one that is "liberated as far as possible from the restraints of goals (telos), hierarchy and causal logic" (Lehmann 1997, p. 56). This constitutes a new kind of architecture of theatre, one wherein each layer of the performance (linguistic, staging, performance) is constructed as equal. This flattening out of the hierarchy of theatre is described by Lehmann as the shift into a textual landscape, wherein the "text is no longer the centre" (Lehmann 1997, p. 57). This structural change also necessarily produces an altered mode of spectator reception; Lehmann states that:

[P]ostdramatic theatre is not simply a new kind of text of staging – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a new type of sign usage in

the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (Lehmann 2006, p. 85)

This structural change to the text has developed further in specific examples of new intermedial works.

Building on Lehmann's use of the term architecture to describe the structure of the sign system in both dramatic and postdramatic theatre, I employ the term *surface* to describe the highlighting of an individual element of theatre's architecture. The Oxford Dictionary describes a surface as "the outside part or uppermost layer of something," but, as architecture is the composition and construction of various surfaces, in theatre's architecture surfaces are multiple. Lehmann even uses the term 'architectonic' to describe The Wooster Group's work, for example, on the basis that their work renders visible the apparatuses of production (2006, p. 149). This is made even more explicit in works that utilise digital technologies to mediate the action, and was something I was interested in highlighting in my own work.

In the case of *Tom William Mitchell*, I attempted to realise this in the form of four screens surrounding the in-the-round stage that, at key points in the narrative, served as live feed for the action playing out in the news-studio set, as well as serving to locate the action through screenplay logline titles at the start of each scene. Through these screens, various surfaces of the production were made identifiable: the mediation of the performance action through the lens of the camera; the screenplay titling technique in the written text transmitted onstage; the genre of a news-room TV drama into the theatre and vice versa. These media *surfaces* were highlighted in the staging, functioning similarly to the reflexive use of text in *The Sovereign Wife*, although the effect here is created through a different theatrical strategy. In both works, however, the text is kept fixed through dramaturgical modes that seek to avoid the closure of spectator

perception; the spectator is actively engaged with the way the meaning is playing out in different mediums of communication and broadcast. In *Tom William Mitchell*, the text is mediated in theatre *and* mediated via film and TV, producing, at times, radically different yet interlinked meanings. As in *The Sovereign Wife*, these reflexive strategies are not simply aesthetic; they directly link to the political argument of the work itself, feeding back into the meaning explored through the text. *Tom William Mitchell* stages a populist uprising filtered through a 24-hour news cycle and the way in which information is twisted and amplified through the medium of live TV news. By staging this text in a multi-media and sensorial environment, I was attempting to make the text's critique of media and politics explicit and playful, involving the spectator in the process. As in *The Sovereign Wife* and *Moving Target*, this is not directly comparable to the straightforward logocentrism of dramatic theatre architecture, as it instead creates a kind of interlinked simultaneity of levels that also builds on postdramatic techniques.

Lehmann's above statement provides a conceptual language to describe the shifting sign usage in contemporary theatre, but does not directly account for the simultaneity of intermedial surfaces I was attempting to articulate through the production. However, by reworking Lehmann's above statement, in light of Pavis's acknowledgement of the difficulties of a definitive classification of text in performance, I arrived at a mission statement that informed my approach to *Tom William Mitchell*:

Textual dramaturgy is not simply a new kind of text of staging, and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a new type of sign usage in the theatre that highlights intermedial levels of theatre as surfaces in production through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes both presence and representation, both shared and communicated experience, both process and product, both manifestation and signification, both energetic impulse and information.

For my work, achieving this interlinked layering of surfaces - the written text, the staging, the performance situation, the mediated performances on screen - was

an attempt to push this formula a step further in order to highlight not just the existence of the intermedial surfaces, but also the medial processes *inherent to* the theatrical situation. Just as the satirical writing of *Network* used the screenplay format to comment on the formulaic construction of story in network television, so too did I aim to make *Tom William Mitchell*, a theatre text, comment on the stage-managed and constructed nature of theatrical representation. This was a way for me to embed the political critique of media populism within the structure of the text, and provided me with a strong starting point for foregrounding medial transmission within the work.



Figure 8. Showing the logline titles. Photography by Carly Young.

Medial Transmission

Central to all of the dramaturgical strategies this thesis explores is the notion that they foreground and stage medial transmission. That is, they reflexively focus on the processes of mediation from media to medium; that is, from written

dramatic form to theatrical performance, theatrical performance to screen and so on. This forms, as Chapple and Kattenbelt argue, a “re-perception of the whole, which is re-constructed through performance” (2006, p. 12). Considering Bolter and Gruisin’s work on media relationships *Remediation*, Chapple and Kattenbelt introduce theatre and performance into that theoretical field, building particularly on the concepts of *immediacy*, *hypermediacy* and *transparency*:

Immediacy or *transparent immediacy* aims at making the viewer forget the presence of the medium, so that they feel they have direct access to the object. *Transparency* means that the viewer is no longer aware of the medium because the medium has – so to say – wiped out its traces. The opposite of *immediacy* is *hypermediacy*, which aims to remind the viewer of the medium by drawing attention to itself in a very deliberate way. (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, p. 14)

As pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, I argue that specific Australian artists are particularly engaged with this notion of the medium’s transparency, and are working in ways that can be viewed, via Chapple and Kattenbelt, as playing with hypermediacy, that is, foregrounding the processes of the medium. The essential aspect of this, however, is that in the dramaturgical practice of artists such as Sisters Grimm, the creative team behind *Moving Target* and Daniel Schlusser Ensemble, it is through *the use of text itself* that this hypermediacy is being brought out. It is not only by the addition of digital technologies that this is being achieved, but by a reflexive focus on the intermedial processes inherent in the theatre medium.

Boenisch’s understanding of theatre as a “genuine intermedial form of art from the very start” (2003b, p. 35) is invaluable here, as it points to the historical ways in which theatre has mediated text through performance, even before new digital technologies were introduced into its aesthetic language. This perspective highlights the modes through which theatre has *always-already* been a site of mediation, and moves from a discussion of intermediality towards a discussion of mediality - that is, the *making present* of the processes of mediation in theatre, the hypermedial foregrounding of these processes. That this is achieved with and

through the text by these Australian artists, rather than simply through the addition of other (re)mediating devices, represents a significant development of the notion of intermediality in theatre. This foregrounding of medial processes does not, as in dramatic theatre, aim for pure transparency of the transmitting medium (theatre), nor does it create hypermediacy through a focus on performative presence as in postdramatic work. Instead, it utilises the text and its fictive cosmos as the site of its mediality, simultaneously aiming for transparency of the medium *and* hypermediacy in the moment of performance. In the introduction I describe this effect, via Weber, as being reminded that you are looking through a window, that what the fiction the spectator sees as transparent is also being constructed and framed.



Figure 9. Photography by Carly Young.

One of the most successful moments in the workshop production presented at the University of Wollongong that aimed at achieving this was a short transition

where performer Harry McGee, playing the politician Simon Abrahams, held three microphones up to his mouth in such a way that, when shot by a camera, it appeared he was being interviewed by multiple members of the media, when in fact he was constructing this image alone. The spectators are made aware in this moment of the image the fictive cosmos is producing (a politician being interviewed on the steps of a courthouse), but they are also aware of the way in which this image is being constructed performatively (he's just holding the microphones himself to produce that effect). It stages the medial process of bringing the image in the text to the stage, exposing that process for satiric effect. That this moment includes spectator awareness of the way in which the action is being framed on camera as well introduces a further layer of mediation. There is the moment in the text, mediated in theatre in an ironic way, then re-mediated on screen in order to achieve more closely the image the text requires. This reflexive re-doubling of the medial processes, here in a short comedic moment, was threaded throughout *Tom William Mitchell*, and formed a key aspect of the work's engagement with the politics of media populism. This moment in particular, in its 'bothness', comments on the stage-managed quality of contemporary politics within a twenty-four-hour news cycle. In this image, the ideas in the text are being re-invigorated *through the very techniques that expose them as being constructions*.

Hypermedium or Hyper-medium

The processes of mediation playing out in recent dramaturgies also point to what Hamilton describes as "'older' processes of (re-)mediation" (2014, p. 520). She builds on Boenisch's understanding of the inherent intermediality of theatre form and "opens up the question of theatre's more recent conceptualization as a *hypermedium*" (2014, p. 520). This term develops from Kattenbelt's reference to theatre as a "medium that contains all media" (2008, p. 23). For Hamilton, *Thyestes* (2010) by The Hayloft Project²⁶, a work emerging from the Melbourne independent sector concurrently to some of the artists this thesis focuses on,

²⁶ By Simon Stone, Chris Ryan, Thomas Henning after Seneca. Dir. Simon Stone.

extends this definition, providing a way of highlighting a dramaturgy that stages an “excessive experience of theatrical space hinging on reflexive strategies that disclose adaptive processes historically specific to the medium” (2014, p. 523). The excessive experience of theatre’s medial processes in *Thyestes* prompts Hamilton to re-work Kattenbelt’s understanding of a *hypermedium* into the notion of a *hyper-medium*. This *hyper-medium* refers to the way in which the older processes of mediation inherent to theatre are amplified and highlighted by the production which reflexively stages Seneca’s Roman tragedy. Staged in traverse, on a blank white surface, *Thyestes*’ dramaturgy relied on the interplay between LED titles above the stage outlining the plot and content of the original drama, and the colloquial Australian scenes that played out following them. Hamilton’s understanding of this work usefully extends this thesis’s exploration of medial transmission’s potential to orient spectator experience of text and medial labour. The spectators are watching the tension between the titles and their realisation. This is particularly complex when, as Hamilton notes, the actor Chris Ryan plays the female characters in the production without making any attempt to represent gender. The gap between what the text describes and what the stage image represents constitutes a foregrounding of the medial labour of the actor, that is, the ‘work’ of representation.

The text, then, in these *hyper-medial* processes, is experienced overtly, foregrounded in a way that productively builds on theatre as a “fundamental site of adaptation” (Hamilton 2014, p. 520). The particular processes of a work of classical adaptation like *Thyestes* does not wholly describe the medial transmission playing out in *Tom William Mitchell*, a new play inspired by two screenplays. Kattenbelt’s term *hypermedium* is arguably more suited to describing a work that stages multiple modes of mediality in order to comment on our mediatised society’s experience of populism and control. However, Hamilton’s use of the term *hyper-medium* allows me to articulate the way in which *Tom William Mitchell* sought to create an excessive experience of mediality, the way in which it foregrounded medial transmission as its key dramaturgical strategy. In this way, the media surfaces utilised in *Tom William Mitchell* could be termed *hyper-medial* as their use in production playfully

amplified the spectator's experience of theatre's inherent processes of representation. As in *The Sovereign Wife* and *Moving Target*, the way in which the spectators' attention is drawn to these representational processes of staging the text - the medial transmission from text to theatre - is defined by this excessive quality, what I describe as the foregrounding of medial transmission. I argue that when the reflexive interplay between dramatic and postdramatic techniques is foregrounded in this way, it produces a complex spectatorial experience of encounter that aims to create active spaces of political critique and subversion.



Figure 10. Set of *Tom William Mitchell*. Photography by Carly Young.

Part of the way I attempted to achieve this in *Tom William Mitchell* came with the decision to stage the work in the round, or rather, the square. Four audience banks were set up to define a square playing space in the middle of the room. Within that stage space was another square, a grey square rimmed with LED strip light that defined a smaller playing space within the larger one. Surrounding the inner square and aligned with the edge were four TV monitors,

which would show live-filmed footage from three onstage cameras as well as pre-recorded material. We also chose to locate the operations desk onstage. This was in part due to the temperamental nature of transmitting live video signal to a control box, but also provided a way of exposing the apparatus of our technical mechanism of live-editing. These mediating strategies allowed me to play with the fictive construct in the text while also exposing the apparatuses used to communicate this construct. Taking into account the specific constraints of presenting the work in a University context, the nevertheless surplus use of digital technology in the set design formed part of the excessive experience of intermediality I wanted to achieve in production. The TV monitors were also used to provide the logline titles I had inserted into the text. This provided a short-cut way for us to locate the action of the scenes, and, as outlined above, also points to the text as a surface within the production, the logline form ironically pointing back at the live-filmed nature of the narrative. The multiple connection points between the fictive cosmos of the text, the intermedial strategies in the staging and the exposure of the apparatus of representation aimed to create a *hyper*-medial reflexivity in the composition that would create ironic political meanings alongside the rise and fall narrative of a media personality.

As explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, via Boenisch, these strategies produce a complex spectatorial engagement that seeks to avoid closure. It is worth revisiting this notion of a fictive or spectator perceptive closure in relation to this work, given Boenisch's critique of two separate works which both utilised a live-filmed aesthetic that raises parallels to *Tom William Mitchell* – albeit in vastly more resourced contexts. As explored previously, the notion of non-closure is central to Boenisch's reading of reflexive dramaturgy, but significantly he does not include, as this Chapter aims to articulate, the exposition of the aesthetics of representation as a core strategy for achieving this. Indeed, Boenisch is critical of Katie Mitchell's work *...some trace of her* for utilising this exact strategy, describing the work, which played with exposing the mechanisms of live-film in an adaptation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's 1868 novel *The Idiot*, as "not reflexively refracted" (2010, p. 167). This observation, that Mitchell supplemented the

dramatic cosmos of the text with the dramatic cosmos of a film studio set that was trying to represent the text, leads Boenisch to conclude that “rather than being genuinely reflexive, [it] in fact achieved a supplementary closure and coherence at another level” (2010, p. 167). This seems at odds with Boenisch’s championing of productions that highlight the “dialectic gap between text and its production” (2010, p. 164) through live-film, which this technique explicitly aims to do. Boenisch suggests that the distinguishing difference between strategies might be generational:

[A] previous generation of theatre-makers tended to deconstruct the act of representation and shift the emphasis to the traditionally transparent act of presentation. Reflexive dramaturgies now see the symbolic cosmos of a text and the material presence of the performance event re-approaching. (Boenisch 2010, p. 170)

His reading of Mitchell’s work appears to stem from his witnessing a pre-production interview, wherein Mitchell describes equipping the actors who played the roles of the cameramen in performance with the same Stanislavskian focus on presenting psychologically motivated characters as the performers playing parts from the novel. His awareness of Mitchell’s “surprisingly traditional directorial ethos” (2010, p. 166), derived from this interview, potentially informed his critique of this level of the work’s dramaturgy. This attitude is notable in light of my own work with live-filmed performance. In *Tom William Mitchell*, the camera operators were actors fulfilling multiple roles in production. One moment they might be filming a current affairs style interview, the next moment they might be in the interview itself as a different character. The delineation between ‘roles’ was arguably more in flux, then, than Mitchell’s supplementing the dramatic cosmos with an equally closed film-set logic. In *Tom William Mitchell*, we did not work in ways that prompted the camera operators to be psychologically motivated. Instead we tried to highlight and play off the slippages between character, performer and technician, engendering an open and reflexive spectatorial relationship with the fictive cosmos of the work and the mechanisms used to achieve it in production. For this work, far from providing closure on a different level as in Mitchell’s *...some trace of her*, this

dramaturgic technique aimed at staging the rift between the text and its production through an excessive *hyper*-medial focus on medial transmission and reflexivity in the staging.

Political Conclusion

As has been touched on in relation to *The Sovereign Wife* and *Moving Target*, the dramaturgical strategies deployed are playing out subversive modes of critique and political engagement. The effect of foregrounding medial transmission fixes the spectator as the nexus of this, implicating them in the process in a way that I have described in Chapter Two as linking to the notion of a Žižekian stain - the point at which the picture stares back at the subject watching. This mode of spectatorship, engendered by reflexive dramaturgies, encourages a politicised, activated watching of these works. In the final Chapter of this thesis, I will explore how this activated mode of spectatorship is creating multivalent and playfully interwoven meanings in Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's *M+M*, the work that is the furthest from conventional ideas of dramatic theatre explored in this thesis, as it is a largely wordless sensorial adaptation of the text of a novel. Achieving this mode of spectatorship was also the aim of *Tom William Mitchell's* intermedial process. For my work, this exposes the political dimension of reflexive dramaturgy, that by making an audience aware of how its thinking is being shaped, a connection is made between the thematic argument about populism and control in the text of *Tom William Mitchell* and the formal elements that produce that text. For me, in making an audience aware of representational processes through multiple media devices within the one medium, and highlighting how each works to create alternating and sometimes conflicting meanings, *Tom William Mitchell* set out to develop a parallax mode of spectatorship – one that plays with a multiplicity of perspectives. This is my, admittedly utopian, idea of contemporary theatre's development of an emancipatory potential - that perhaps, by making an audience aware of how its thinking is being shaped, new Australian textual dramaturgy is utilising a politics

that encourages a subjective agency in the spectator, creating critical reflection on, in this case, contemporary populism and the seductive nature of apathy. Each case study, in its own way, uses these strategies to encourage this type of critical reflection in a spectator. As such, the way these Australia artists are implementing text in their dramaturgy reveals a re-orientation of text's position in theatre, not just for the sake of experimentation, but as a way of activating and exploring a politics of resistance to the dominant narratives of the contemporary socio-political era. In this way, the textual dramaturgies exemplified by Sisters Grimm, *Moving Target* and, as the next Chapter will outline, Daniel Schlusser Ensemble, all stage politics in a playful and reflexive way, avoiding didacticism and creating a complex and multivalent response in an activated spectator that points to the reductiveness of the idea of text-based theatre. Text, in these productions - and as I explored through my own work - is a media surface that productions respond to in a multitude of ways that are not illustrative, and are instead playfully contesting, exposing, probing, re-doubling and satirising the text as a way of productively contributing to the argument of the text itself. Exposing the mechanisms that produce the text in *Tom William Mitchell*, for example, feeds back into the text's argument about media mechanisms of control. Calling this process 'literary', text-based or illustrative, misses the full complexity of how text is being utilised by these artists and - as the responses to adaptations like *M+M* in the next Chapter will demonstrate - indicate a serious gap in the language used to describe contemporary Australian theatre works.

Chapter Five:

M+M

Croggan's provocation about text-based theatre in an Australian context raised in the introduction to this thesis was in response to a work that loosely adapted a novella, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. This work by The Rabble was staged at Theatre Works, St Kilda, as a part of the 2013 Melbourne Festival. This thesis concludes its case studies with another work staged at Theatre Works as a part of that festival, one that also responded to an important piece of twentieth century Literature, in this case, Mikael Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. A dramaturgical analysis of this work reveals a particular mode of activated 'working' spectatorship, which I develop here in relation to Alain Badiou's critical work *A Rhapsody for Theatre* and Boenisch's exploration of *Regie*. This study also allows me to connect the way in which medial transmission is affecting spectatorship to the artist's political and artistic motivations, defined here through the concept of metamodernism. That this particular work stages an alternative non-dramatic medium of text (a novel) in theatre further highlights medial transmission as a key way of moving beyond text-based theatre as a category of analysis. As even though *M+M* is named after, and directly responds to, the text of *Master and Margarita*, almost none of the novel is reproduced in spoken form in the performance. Analysing the specific ways this theatre work responds to text, beyond reproducing it as spoken language, significantly extends my thesis's reading of text's role in contemporary dramaturgy and provides an opportunity to comment on the nature of fidelity to the text in a contemporary context. This Chapter uses *M+M* as a frame to touch on the recent 'adaption debate' in an Australian context and suggests that a critical focus on medial transmission could provide a way out of the misconceptions and binary thinking that have characterised that debate. Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's *M+M* provides a platform for this thesis to further the conceptualisation of Australian works that utilise, critique, re-stage, repurpose and respond to textual material. By

focusing on the foregrounding of medial transmission from page to stage (and to screen) in these works, not just through the dialogic presentation of spoken text in performance, but through analysis of a specifically theatrical response to text as a medial 'starting point' for performance, this thesis contributes an understanding of specific Australian textual dramaturgies that use text as a repository of meaning for the production. *M+M*'s use of text, in this way, is not furthered by the concept of text-based theatre, but instead by understanding the political and thematic resonances that are made possible by playing with the theatre medium's inherent intermediality in relation to the staging of text – even when the text itself, in its form as constructed language, is not a part of the production.

M + M

Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's *M+M* is a largely wordless piece of theatre that uses Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita* as its starting point. First published posthumously in 1967, *Master and Margarita* is considered one of the most significant novels of the twentieth century and has been adapted numerous times for film, radio, TV, comic books, opera and theatre. The novel is set in 1930s Moscow and the Jerusalem of Pontius Pilate and follows the Devil's impact on a small set of literary and theatrical types, while also recounting Jesus's encounter with Pontius Pilate. *M+M* is billed as Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* "funneled through a contemporary context of political incarceration" (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble Website 2013). The dramaturgy of the work references the world-wide media-storm of the Pussy Riot arrests and trial in 2012, refracted through the themes and narrative of *Master and Margarita*. When thinking about *M+M*, it is important to be clear about the relationship between the theatrical performance and Bulgakov's novel. The performance is not a direct adaptation of the novel's structure, scenarios or even characters; rather, it uses the novel as a "starting point for an original theatrical exploration" (Perkovic 2013b). The form that this exploration takes is the creation of "various

presents" (Croggon 2013b) in a "free form, chaotic stage event" (Perkovic 2013a) set in a kind of prison, with bunk beds, metal cages and large lockers along the back wall. The action is sometimes filmed by onstage cameras and routed to TVs hanging from the ceiling. The work begins by aping the structures of incarceration. Loud buzzers signify changes in the action. Nothing much happens. A phone rings. The actors are lying in their bunks. Two male guards interview the female detainees ("do you believe in Jesus?"), who answer: "what do you want me to say, I love Putin, I love him, ok? I love Putin." This mundane beginning then develops into increasingly dream-like images and actions. It has the feel of a scored improvisation, where the performances and images that develop are reactive to the present moment, to the source material of *Master and Margarita* and to a pre-existing theatrical structure, or set-list. The actors shift between playing the enactors of various oppressions and the victims of some unnamed external force. Notions of character do not apply here as "identity is never fixed" (Harkins-Cross 2013); rather, everything - relationships, imagery and dialogue - is *at play*, with many fragments occurring at once. It is almost as if fragments of the novel have become the collective hallucination of the inmates in a contemporary Russian gulag (which is also in Melbourne, Australia), but this arguably puts too neat a psychological reading on the work. Perkovic describes Schlusser's method as:

(R)educing a play—the psychology of characters, interpersonal conflict, the plot—into pure, physical metonymy. Whittled down to its most rudimentary theme, it is then re-built as devised, durational, anti-theatrical performance, bearing superficially no resemblance to the original work, and hardly any to theatre. (Perkovic 2013b)

It is a purely theatrical event that resists perceptive closure either of pure representation or non-fictive performance. In doing so it invites multiple, concurrent and reflexive readings.

There have been several major adaptations of the *Master and Margarita* in an international context since the turn of the century, with many respected figures

approaching the work. Simon McBurney of Complicite directed the work for the Barbican in 2013, a production that relied heavily on “technical wizardry” (Gardner 2013) to stage the multi-layered plot. As is characteristic of Complicite’s work, projections, microphones and heavy sound design functioned to tell the story of the novel, adapted by McBurney, Edward Kemp and the company. Oskaras Koršunovas Theatre from Lithuania also produced a highly physical adaptation that premiered at the Avignon Festival in 2000, set around a huge circular table which used sheets of paper as a major motif, a production which director Koršunovas has described as the “greatest miracle in my entire artistic career, as a meeting of the material particularly dear to me, and the most important festival” (OKT 2000). Frank Carstorf also directed a production of the novel for the Volksbühne in Berlin in 2005 in which he applied his interest in live filming the actors inside spaces which deny the audience the position of a privileged spectator, hiding them within complicated set pieces that revealed secret compartments as the work progressed. What these three major productions have in common, despite their wildly differing aesthetics, is that they, in their own ways, produced a more or less faithful narrative version of the novel, staging it with a sense of character and place, creating, through their individual approaches to the material, a cohesive sense of the fictional realm of the novel. Where Schlusser’s approach differs is that he and his company have almost retreated entirely from the specifics of the novel itself, but nevertheless have created a work which undoubtedly relates to the fictive cosmos and form of the novel.



Figure 11. *M+M*. Photography by Daisy Noyes.

Schlusser describes his approach to the work in a pre-production interview:

“It is actually a legitimate attempt to get the spirit or the flavour of that writer and that novel really truly, rather than through traditional theatre signs. The irony is,” he observes, “that by trying to be more precisely faithful, we’re actually further and further away from the specifics of that book, in a quest to actually nail what the thesis is.” (In B McCallum 2013)

Schlusser’s description of himself as a faithful servant to the writer’s central thesis challenges several critical understandings of this work, and of adaption in an Australian context more broadly. Unpacking this notion in relation to *M+M* details the mode of active spectatorship engendered by the foregrounding of medial transmission in theatre works, an active spectatorial reading of the transmission between textual source material and staged reality. In this work in particular, where the textual source material is non-dramatic, and conventional understandings of textual adaption do not apply, this transmission is a site of dialectical play.

Adaptions: The Potential of Text

Can we give a simple answer to the question “What is a theatre text?” No, because taken in isolation the text does not decide this question: it is only one of the many constitutive elements of theatre. Only that which has been, is, or will be played counts as theatre properly speaking. The event (the representation) retroactively qualifies the text whose written existence nonetheless anticipated it. A text will be part of theatre if it has been played. Hence: the theatre text exists only in the future anterior. Its quality is in suspense. (Badiou 2008 p. 210)

French philosopher Alain Badiou is here opening the boundaries of the term text-based. For Badiou, a theatre text is only that which has been a part of an ‘event’. The text itself has no formal qualities that can empirically define it as a theatre text, only that it has been performed. Implicit in this is the idea that theatre can respond to textual material in non-dramatic forms, as well as forms that develop through rehearsal. This has been explored in previous chapters in relation to theatre-making processes with text, but here too, if - as Badiou points out - a text is qualified as a theatre text retroactively, might not the Bulgakov novel at the heart of *M+M* qualify as a theatre text? Badiou is unambivalent in cases such as this, stating that “any book can see theatre take hold of it, provided it first undoes it, detotalizes it [and] punctuates it” (2008, p. 211). Schlusser identifies a similar process at work in his productions. His idea of faithfulness, portrayed as a departure from the details of the book itself, functions as this de-totalisation of the novel form, remaking and thus, retroactively transforming *Master and Margarita* into a theatre text. For Schlusser the attraction to this process, is precisely the impossibility of the novel’s easy representation onstage, he is deliberately “choosing something that will stretch the form” (Schlusser in Fuhmann 2012). Badiou describes this process as a type of creative destruction: “[t]he theatrical action will thus ruin the whole whose glorious redoing it will then ensure” (2008, p. 211). The adaptation is, for him, about the inconsistent

consistencies between the text's 'spirit' and its theatrical embodiment, the rift between the discourse of the text and its production that characterises reflexive dramaturgy.

Given these inconsistencies, however, it is worth examining whether this is an example of adaptation at all. Schlusser has raised doubts about this, stating in an interview with Melbourne Festival programmer Josephine Ridge that "we've called it *M+M* because ... we're not doing an adaptation of the novel, so partly we're just flagging to our audience that the source material is just that, source material" (Ridge 2013). This complicates the use of the term adaptation in relation to what Schlusser sees as a different kind of response, what Badiou might term the 'undoing' of the novel. For this thesis, this 'undoing' is more accurately described via Boenisch as a process of mediation. The novel form is being re-mediated in the moment of performance. However, this idea of 'undoing' is also present in adaptation studies in a theatrical context. Mark Fortier has explored adaptations by Heiner Müller, Carmelo Bene and Herbert Blau in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of a minor literature, emphasising how theatre as a site of adaptation contains the strong potential for the "unravelling of fixed, hegemonic readings" (Fortier 1996). Boenisch, too, sees this potential in the works of Ostermeier and Carstorf, describing their approaches to adaptations as "necessarily wrong interpretations" that use their 'wrongness' to tap into the "negative truth of the play-text, where it breaks through the hegemonic order of the sensible" (Boenisch 2015, p. 185). Fortier also is concerned with the idea of adaptation as a larger cultural phenomenon, using Derrida's relational structure of archewriting to writing (the possibility of expression to the act of speech or text) to situate adaptation as "not only the particular acts of secondary creation, but the very possibility of cultural activity going forward" (Fortier in Fischlin (ed) 2014, p. 375). This notion of adaptation as a secondary creation is shared by Hutcheon, who defines adaptation threefold as: a transcoding from one medium, context or perspective to another; a creative act of interpretation; and an intertextual reading of the original work (Hutcheon 2012). She defines the adaptation as "second without being secondary. Its own palimpsestic thing" (Hutcheon 2012, p. 9).

While adaptation studies do provide an interesting platform to read the interpretive shifts and decisions present in *M+M*, there are also problematic elements relating to the notion of spectator perception, and the concept of any adaptation being second. It is this last point, that of adaptation being a palimpsestic process and something that we, as spectators, necessarily read solely *through* our knowledge of the originating source, that Hamilton takes issue with in her analysis of *Thyestes* by the Hayloft Project. Her notion of theatre as a *hyper*-medium, explored in the last Chapter, locates theatre as a medium that makes processes of mediation present and identifiable. Boenisch, too, as described in Chapter Three, emphasises the processes of mediation as a way of thinking with and through text dialectically, reflexively opening up space for the spectator to experience an encounter with the text. If, however, we were to define *M+M* entirely as an example of adaptation of *Master and Margarita*, the eventuating production would only be readable via its connections to the original novel, rather than through the many alternate frames, images and codes it introduces to the novel's world. This approach ignores the added layers of meaning around incarceration in contemporary Russia, the Pussy Riot trials and the meta-theatrical acknowledgement of the work's place in St Kilda, Melbourne. It is important not to do this, as the analysis of this work would suffer as a consequence, missing the full breadth of the Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's attempt at 'nailing the novel's thesis'. As such, instead of reading the theatre-work solely *through* knowledge of the original text and treating *M+M* as secondary, I analyse how the work encourages spectators to think *with and through* the text by exposing processes of mediation inherent to using a novel as textual source material in theatre, bringing to it a fascinating layering of fictive space, from both the novel and the life of its author, and contemporary political references.

The opening moment of *M+M* is perhaps one of the easiest places to identify the complex notions surrounding the use of *Master and Margarita* as source material for the work. It is an example of how the problems of adapted text are almost directly referred to at the outset. In this moment, Mark Winter, dressed as a

guard, answers a ringing telephone. The first words we hear clearly are “I don’t speak Russian”. This functions as a direct reference to the novel, paraphrasing the devil disguised as Professor Woland’s statement to the poet Bezedomny: “No understand, no speak Russian” (Bulgakov 2004 p. 39). At this point though, with the spectators seated in a theatre in St Kilda, this beginning cannot help but be an acknowledgment of the difficulties/impossibilities of adaptation. Harkins-Cross (2013) identified this moment as “gesturing towards problems of translation and adaptation”, which, while a useful observation, misses the full political implications of this moment and how they resonate throughout the work. Croggon notes that *M+M*’s principal interest is the viability of art as political resistance in a contemporary context (2013b). She identifies in the work “the desire to make, the desire to be free, the desire to love, in a world which again and again destroys these possibilities” (Croggon 2013b). The act of acknowledging the difficulties in translating this political context, both of the original novel, and the contemporary imprisonment of Pussy Riot, is a prime example of a mediating process at work. Schlusser and the ensemble are thinking *with* the text, using the text’s history and cultural significance as a way of thinking through contemporary political contexts and, conversely, using contemporary references to illuminate and respond to the originating text. As the audience of this work, there is no arche-text here that governs our understanding completely. We are, like the Daniel Schlusser Ensemble, thinking with and through the text.



Figure 12. *M+M Interrogation*. Photography by Daisy Noyes.

Regie

This particular mode of mediation has, of course, been framed by Schlusser as the director of the work. This approach to direction, one that uses text as way of dialectically thinking through ideas, has been described by Boenisch as *Regie*, a term which he develops first in relation to the historical *Regietheater*. This much misused and maligned term is, as Boenisch notes, often mistranslated into English as ‘Director’s theatre’, an almost derogatory term for productions that seemingly privilege the auteur director over the playwright. Boenisch notes that the correct translation is closer to ‘directing theatre’ (2014c, p. 7), a translation that more specifically highlights the importance of process. For Boenisch, this is a practice which has its own history and which emerged long before its received beginning in Germany in the 1960s and 70s. This typical history cites *Regietheater* as a historical practice of directorial deconstruction of classic texts typified by practitioners like Peter Zadek and Peter Stein. For Boenisch, however, this form stems from much earlier than even Andre Antoine and the Théâtre Libre in 1887, which is still often marked as the first instance of the role of the

director coming to the forefront of theatrical production. Boenisch dates its emergence to almost a century earlier, in 1789, with the first documented *Regisseur* being appointed at the Vienna Burgtheater. This reframing of the history of *Regie* is the initial point in Boenisch's rejection of the disparaging characterisation of *Regietheater* as a perverting of the text, and his reconceptualisation of the term as indicating a process of 'thinking'. For Boenisch, *Regie* is then "a cultural technique and specifically theatral (mediating) force which (re-)negotiates the relations of texts and theatre, scenes and senses, performances and audiences, of cultural histories and traditions and the present with its ultimately pressing issues and concerns" (2014c, p. 2). This is, for his theory, a way of thinking through a directorial approach to text beyond the authority/authorship debate that sets up an opposition between a director and playwright. In processes such as *M+M*, as with *Moving Target*, the collaborative mode of making means the 'thinking with text' is shared by the director, the designer and the ensemble of actors, which arguably extends Boenisch's point to encompass theatre-making processes as well as director-led ones. Boenisch, above all, emphasises the importance of *play* between theatre and text, a mediation that he describes as theatral. This term develops from Jean Alter's use of theatrality (1981), used rather than the pejorative theatricality, to describe the potentiality within a given theatre text for its transformation into performance, the opportunities for a director to add in their own "referents" (Alter 1981, p. 133). We can see, then, that Boenisch's development of the term in relation to *Regie* refers to exactly this play of potentialities, the mediation of text in theatre:

Regie is a public intervention through theatre and theatral thinking, even a utopia of human play and liberty. Instead of clarifying, illustrating and ascertaining unambiguous clear meaning, and rather than suggesting the immediate availability of everything as commodity, the play of *Regie* problematises any such uniform clarity. (Boenisch 2014c, p. 6)

In *M+M* we can see a clear example of this theatral mediation that does not aim for uniformity or unambiguity, an approach that results in the complex and parallax relationship between spectators and the stage. This is most clearly

achieved through the exposure of the aesthetics of representation or, as Croggon notes, “the performance ceases to represent and instead becomes a pure theatrical act” (Croggon 2013b).

By tracing the theatral development of one such image, from the original text to its multiple iterations in performance, we can identify the spectator relationship Croggon is referring to in the cessation of representational strategies. The character of Behemoth from Bulgakov’s novel, the gigantic pistol toting cat who can transform into a human, is an iconic image from the novel; the black cat appears on the cover of many editions of the book. Schlusser acknowledges the presence of the cat in *M+M*: “Behemoth makes an appearance ... I’m not going to say any more than that. I think we’ve found a solution” (B McCallum, 2013). The solution comes late in the work - a crush of bodies lies centre stage, performer Mark Winter stands next to them holding helium balloons, as does Edwina Wren, wearing a Roman centurion helmet, Wren is talking softly to the bodies. Snow falls from the flies. A locker at the back of the stage opens, light pouring out, and performer Karen Sibbing emerges naked and covered completely in black paint. It is apparent that she has painted it on herself, we can see the patches she’s missed on the back of her legs and her lower back. Her physicality shifts, she seems to crawl over the bunk beds, her gaze curious, mercurial. From the top of one of the bunk beds, she approaches Winter, still staring at the bodies, and loops a belt around his neck, choking him, he fights against it, the bodies rise from the floor, the snow stops, the light shifts, the bunk bed is dragged centre stage by Winter, a kind of chariot is formed, with Sibbing, painted black, the driver. This moment is somewhat foreshadowed earlier in the work, where Winter tells the stage: “When you look at me, I want you to see a cat. Every time you talk to me, I want you to talk to me like I’m a cat. And every time you imagine me, I want you to imagine me like I’m a cat. That’s me purring motherfucker!” Sibbing, in transforming herself into Behemoth, has symbolically stripped Winter of his cat-imaginary in the audience’s mind. The development of these moments enacts the destruction and re-invigoration of a representation, and each moment, in its own way, shows the playful way in which theatral mediation from novel to theatre is achieved in the work.



Figure 13. *M+M*. Behemoth emerges. Photography by Daisy Noyes.

Winter's verbal, language-based commands place the onus on the audience to do the representative work. It is in the mind of the spectator whether or not Winter comes to represent a cat. This sets up an expectation in the audience of their own imaginary engagement with the work, in a way similar to British writer and performer Tim Crouch's *My Arm*²⁷, a work in which the performer plays a man who put his arm in the air one day and never put it down, without ever having his arm in the air in the performance itself. This playful relationship between described reality and actual stage reality is reflexive in its operation, as the spectator's viewpoint is parallax. Lehmann describes how theatre "implicitly invites not only performative acts that confer new meanings but also such performative acts that bring about meaning in a new way, or rather: put meaning itself at stake" (Lehmann 2006, p. 102). Winter, then, both is and isn't a cat as he describes, just as Tim Crouch does and doesn't have his hand in the air. The spectatorial pleasure is derived from the dialectic tension between this *is* and *isn't* structure which puts meaning itself at stake. Crouch describes this as the spectator being a "necessary contributing factor to the creative act" (in Radosavlevic 2013, p. 218). Crouch states:

²⁷ First performed at Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, 2003.

If we work too hard to make everything look like the thing we say it is, then we're also removing any sense of the game of art. A game that is so effortlessly played by young children who need no figurative support to make their play real (Crouch 2014).

This is a game created by an openness in the performative act by Winter, one that functions on several levels. There is, first, the theatrical response of the moment in relation to the novel itself, the palimpsestic reading that Hutcheon promotes. Spectators familiar with the novel will be able to read Winter's statements as a 'referent' or adaptive reference to the source material; they are conscious, then, of the mediation of novel to stage. Second, there is the game of the implied meaning of Winter's use of descriptive language, versus the actual stage reality, which the spectators synthesise (or not) with their own mediative process, which, by including them in the game, shows itself as a reflexive. Boenisch, writing on reflexive dramaturgies, comments that "the spectators, as a direct effect, are confronted with their own dislocation and disorientation facing the performance of the text" (2010 p. 171). What this moment in *M+M* emphasises is that this disorientation is a productive, properly playful position that creates a kind of *work* for the spectator.

Working Spectatorship: Medial Labour

The latter development of the Behemoth figure functions in a different, although no less playful, fashion. Here the tension is in the image exposing the aesthetics of its own representation, not through language, but through the way in which the image sequence is constructed. Karen Sibbing's emergence from the locker develops from a moment of stillness. The stage is more theatrically lit than previously. Here the representational mechanisms are on show, the paint, the light, even the physical transformation of the performer only hinted at by Winter. Instead of experiencing the play of language, though, here we are seeing the representation in the space, but there is still a game. Given the fact that we can see the clarity of how this image is produced – it is just painted on - we can see

the referent, quite literally, painted into being on the stage. Badiou can be applied here to describe the process as “attach(ing) the development of meaning to the lacunae of the play” (2008 p. 24). This reference to lacunae develops the notion of a gap in Žižekian terms, a kind of parallax position where there is the simultaneity of awareness of representation and production, which therefore includes the spectator as part of the picture. Badiou describes the spectator as one who will “feel the hardness of his seat”, one who is alive to the stage as the “interpreter of the interpretation” (2008 p. 24). Boenisch highlights how this interpretative work for the spectator includes and implicates them in the production through “acts of watching” (2014a, p. 50).

Responding to Guy Cassier’s multi-medial and highly political theatre works, Boenisch describes how they:

Challenge our own perception of and our own relation to ourselves – *as spectating subjects*. This happens at a purely formal level, beyond (or, rather: beneath) the levels of content and (symbolic) representation, and certainly before the standard primary concern with the interpretation of plays and performances. (Boenisch 2014a, p. 52)

The spectators’ experience of *watching themselves watching*, as explored in Chapter One, is achieved through a reflexive foregrounding of medial processes and, as Boenisch describes, on a “carefully calibrated dramaturgic balance of dramatic narration and postdramatic presentation” (2014a, p. 50). The mode of spectatorship this engenders is parallax, and includes the spectator in the processes of the theatre event. Echoing Crouch, Badiou ironically asks (2008, p. 24) who would not hate an event where you’ve paid for entertainment, but instead are forced to work for it! This work is, however, a key outcome of foregrounding medial transmission. There is a highlighting of the medial labour of the performance; the aesthetics of representation are exposed. But also, representation is left, or unfinished or ambiguous, in order to encourage medial labour in the spectator as well. They must attach meaning to the lacunae of the work. Every time they look at *Winter* they are asked to see a cat. In this way,

through their medial labour, they are included in the process as a working spectator.

These Australian artists are interested not in perceptive closure, but in cracking open multiple, concurrent readings using text as a departure point. Whether or not they are adaptations becomes a somewhat moot point; instead they should be seen as poetic reservoirs of material that can be tapped in ways that produce playful and open readings, source material that has theatrical potential for directors and companies interested in 'thinking with' the ideas within the text – rather than simply illustrating them. The active process of encounter with text in *M+M* extends as a visual and poetic response to text, rather than its literal representation. This conception of the role of text in theatre is a substantial advancement on what has traditionally been read as its role in dramatic theatre – and also postdramatic forms – as, in *M+M*, the text is used as the nexus for playing with multiple and concurrent layers of fictive and non-fictive space.

Fictive Space: The Irruption of the Real

In *M+M* the novel's themes are transformed into actions, which then develop a dramaturgical logic of their own, built on an accumulation of affective signs. The questioning about Jesus at the work's beginning (a reference to the novel's Christian imagery and perhaps the figure of Pontius Pilate in the Master's meta novel), for example, mutates into another performer, Karen Sibbing, attempting to nail a bit of wood to her hand in a later fragment. This then shifts through countless other versions, into Josh Wright, in drag again, with a blanket shrouding his head in the style of the common images of the Mother Mary. Perkovic, citing one of Žižek's favourite cinematic examples, connects David Lynch to the logic within *M+M*, calling it "a Lynchian phantasmagoria, through which elements of Bulgakov's novel refract with dreamlike logic" (2013b). This continues until we reach the penultimate image of the work: three women standing on the lockers at the back of the stage, their arms held aloft in a Christ-like pose by helium balloons tied to each of their wrists. They stay in this

position for at least fifteen minutes, in obvious real discomfort and pain. In this image the multiple worlds of the production become concrete: the Christian symbolism in the original novel, the contemporary punishment of Pussy Riot in Russia under Putin and a group of actors in Melbourne making a work of art about it.



Figure 14. *M+M* Crucifixion Scene. Photography by Daisy Noyes.

This excessive character of the final moments of *M+M*, is where Schlusser's stated interest in the forms of performance art come into the work. "I still have a soft spot for those crazy conceptual artists who do things to themselves. There's something satisfying about it, in a purely priestly way" (in Furhmann 2012). This interest manifests in the aforementioned penultimate moment of the work - the three women standing on the lockers, crucified by Helium balloons, enduring actual physical suffering onstage. This moment, which endures for longer than feels possible, exists in lineage with the performance art that Schlusser suggests, but also with postdramatic strategies relating to the irruption of the real.

When the staging practice forces the spectators to wonder whether they should react to the events on stage as fiction (ie. aesthetically) or as reality (for example, morally), theatre's treading of the borderline of the real unsettles this crucial predisposition of the spectator: the unreflected certainty and security in which they experience being spectators as an unproblematic social behaviour. (Lehmann 2006, p. 104)

The difficult ethical position in which this puts the audience, apart from being a potent, and properly political, questioning of the power of art, is a further example of the kind of reflexivity this treatment of the stage encourages in a spectator. It is not, as Lehmann defines, encouraging either an aesthetic or a moral reception in the spectator, but instead fixing them in a 'doubled' viewpoint between the two – a parallax perspective. The crucifixion event is readable within the loose stage reality that has been set up, but the physical extremity of this moment means we also read, more clearly than before, each performer as a real individual undergoing suffering. The image, however, has metaphoric qualities which link it both to the image of Christ on the cross in the novel, and to the three, at the time of performance, still incarcerated members of Pussy Riot. These qualities are, in some ways, interrupted by an awareness of the real suffering of the three actors going through the image, but they are also amplified by it. The effect of the interrupted real, the caesura of the stage fiction, in fact feeds back into the image's power as a fiction. This complex re-doubling of fictive and non-fictive space implies an active work in the spectator, an awareness of the duality of the moment in foregrounding the representational mechanisms of theatre. Lehmann states that "all theatrical signs are at the same time physically real things" (2006, p. 102), and in this way, Schlusser is exploiting the metaphoric qualities of theatre's potential to be both real and not real simultaneously.

The irruption of the real is also a useful way of viewing the moment following the crucifixion. Emily Tomlins, who is identifiably in more pain than the others, is the last one to get her balloons popped. As soon as they are burst, she runs to the side stage door, opens it, and runs out into the Theatre Works courtyard. She

escapes into contemporary St Kilda after being tortured in a theatre work about contemporary Russia. The other performers seem shocked; perhaps they hadn't realised that this was a possibility. This moment is an example of a parallax, a constantly shifting perspective between fictions and reality in theatre, and also an example of the way theatre-makers working with text are engineering the breakdown of aesthetic distance in their works. This is significant, given Lehmann's assertion that "aesthetic distance of the spectator is a phenomenon of dramatic theatre" (Lehmann 2006, p. 104), for here we have work that is responding to text, and which is also interested in breaking down this aesthetic distance. *M+M* plays with exposing the aesthetics of its representation in a way that draws attention to reality, heightening our awareness of it as theatrically produced, much like a magician performing and then also explaining a trick.²⁸

Halfway through the crucifixion scene, Darren Verhagen's sound design of drums and feedback is deafening. Nikki Shiels is burning pages of a script in a metal barrel, a reference to the famous epithet "Manuscripts don't burn" from the Bulgakov, a snippet that is usually read in relation to the biographical details of his life - his trouble finding work as a writer, and his eventual capitulation to Stalin's party line. At this moment, another layer of the performance is uncovered in the work. Schlusser himself, the director, enters the stage from the auditorium. He checks a camera, he goes around and whispers something to an actor or two. He goes over and places a hand on the feet of each of the three women standing at the back of stage, checking, are you all right? This, in Schlusser's rehearsal practice, is called "applying heat" (Schlusser 2010, p. iii), a directorial mode of engagement wherein Schlusser enters the improvisation or performance and observes, more closely, the performer's work. This process is a way of using "physical presence as a way of framing, of providing a presence that short-circuits potential hysteria or over-theatricalisation" (Schlusser 2010, p. 21). This had previously (to my knowledge) been a practice that was kept in the rehearsal room. In *M+M*, though, he enters the performance itself. A spectator,

²⁸ This, coincidentally, is also the theatrical structure of Professor Woland's black magic show at the theatre in the novel itself - tricks and their exposition.

then, unaware of the significance of this act in the process of the work, instead reads it as a further break from the symbolic 'world' the work is creating, a moment when the real of the performance situation, that this is a construct with a director, is exposed. However, the timing of this interruption indicates there is more going on than a purely meta-theatrical Verfremdungseffekt. This act from Schlusser also feeds into the fictive universe, in that he becomes readable as the author of this suffering. While he might be checking in with the actors' limits, his ethical position here is complex. By exposing himself to this judgement, by locating the act of crucifixion with his entry, he becomes the absent figure that is causing the cycles of oppression within the work. Here we can locate the heart of Schlusser's reading of the novel; *Master and Margarita* is about a "broken author" (Furhmann 2012), a role in which Schlusser has cast himself.

Of course, some awareness of these layers of reality is intrinsic to the theatrical situation itself; this is the parallax mode of theatre spectating, and we are watching a construct, of which we are always, on some level, aware. But these artists are not only interested in the breakdown of the fictive qualities of theatre in favour of the real, but instead are using the impact of the irrupted real, to feed back into the fictive construction. Emily Tomlins escaping the theatre has palpable emotional and structural impact on the world of the work. It is not only a meta-theatrical moment that shatters the illusion of the stage, but it is also a moment that we can read back into the stage world with clarity and a certain excitement: more things are possible, perhaps escape is possible. Schlusser entering the frame as the author of their suffering echoes the biographical details of Bulgakov's life, and the meta-realm of the novel. Thus, rather than the irrupted real only functioning to destroy or compromise the closed universe of the performance, these moments functions doubly. They take on the quality of a symbol, in their very non-symbolic, real experience. These complex layers of fictive space that such strategies create fix the spectators in reflexive 'acts of watching', and, in highlighting the medial transmission from novel to theatrical performance, challenge notions of adaptation in an Australian context, as well as pointing to the unhelpfulness of text-based theatre as a category of analysis in

relation to these works.

Adaptation Debate

If we can say that these strategies of working with text, defined in this thesis as reflexive but manifesting in vastly different ways in each artist's practice, are developing in Australia as well as internationally, the question then becomes why these strategies are being employed, what they are being used in response to, how they have developed from dramatic movements historically, and what 'conditions' of contemporary society predicate them. These questions are of particular pertinence given the furor surrounding the 'adaption debate' in an Australian context. This debate, full of straw men, cross-generational accusation and misinformation, nevertheless indicates that the idea of text-based theatre in Australia is a contested one. "The Perfect Storm" (Croggon 2013d) played out as a series of articles, tweets, comment streams and editorials in mid-2013, the opposing sides being playwrights and their supporters against directors and their programmers. The argument essentially centred on the industry representation of new Australian texts in AMPAG theatres, further stoked by comments from director Simon Stone, which he contests.²⁹ This thesis starts at some of the more interesting implications: the changing conception of authorship in contemporary theatre, the political viability of adaptation, and the sensibility at work in recent Australian work.

The critical split between devising theatre and text-based theatre hinges on the perceived absence or presence of a text prior to rehearsal and production. Radosavljević highlights how this split is a manifestation of the English-speaking world and that it "may not find easy equivalents in some of the other European cultures in which the verbal and corporeal elements may be more integrated" (Radosavljević 2013, p. 65). She goes on to argue that devising is in fact a

²⁹ Primarily his statement "More often than not, they write bad plays" (in Neill 2013). Stone criticised the article for misreading him, emphasising how he had stated that new plays take time and development, whereas his adaptations can be fast tracked. He was, according to him, "trying to be self effacing" (in Croggon 2013e).

historical category of performance and that its methodologies have been subsumed into a broad range of practices including adaptation. Adaptation is then another ground on which authorship and authority are shifting to be more fluid in contemporary Australian theatre. Perth playwright, Gita Berzard stated, in a wrap up of a Playwriting Australia run workshop on the playwright in the devising process, that “because devising itself is a slippery sucker to pin down and explain, trying to define the writer’s role within that and how best a writer can function, is difficult” (Berzard 2013). Her experience, while positive, showcases the mindset from which the practices of playwrighting and devising are seen as separate. Radosavljevic would argue that in a devised process there is no playwright, only someone with a particular set of skills, just as another person in the ensemble might have skills in performance or clowning. In *M+M* these categories are similarly not applicable; there is only the performer/actor/creators/authors who are ‘in’ the work and an outside eye (Schlusser) who takes on the role of director.

(I)n the rehearsal room, I am at all times a substitute for the audience. It is important that I view the work, for as long as feasibly possible, from the perspective and with the kind of knowledge that my audience will have. This treatment of text does not preclude concrete decisions. I would distance myself from terminology like “devised”, “experimental” or “exploratory”, not because they are not appropriate - the aims are the same - but because they commonly imply a type of freedom that I do not allow myself. (Schlusser 2010, p. 10)

Authorship in this context is shared between the ensemble, but located in the act of reading and “making sense” (Boenisch 2014c, p. 7) of the material. The political implications of this mode of working with text, if we look more broadly than the arguments around representation on stages, is also a site of interest for the international community. The prevalence of classic works being re-imagined, staged in different contexts at festivals here and overseas, has spawned an international field of study around the ‘why’ of this prevalence in relation to contemporary capitalism. Here German theatre director Thomas Ostermeier

provides an apt metaphor:

They are Trojan horses. It's as simple as that. You write on the tin *An Enemy of the People*, *Hedda Gabler* or *Hamlet*, and you cater to the audience, the same audience who also fill our museums from MOMA in New York to the Tate Modern in London, or the Nationalgalerie here in Berlin. Our bourgeois class, confronted with a loss of meaning and driven by a desire to make sense of the world, seeks to satisfy this desire by turning to the classical canon of art. (Ostermeier in Boenisch 2014b, p. 24)

The political motivation inherent in the idea of a 'Trojan horse' is one of revolt or overthrow, but, as Ostermeier notes, the political nature of the work also contributes to its value within a capitalistic framework.³⁰ Boenisch provides an alternative reading of these dramaturgies that retains their utopian potential:

Against the logic of Capital positing itself as the one and only universal narrative and signifier, and as the sole link to transcend any division of nation, gender, race, or class, the speculative theatrical mediation of these canonical texts, which *Regie* unlocks, counters with its own claim for universality. (Boenisch 2014c, p. 6)

Boenisch argues that the 'making sense' of the text that is shared by the creators of the work and the spectators of it provides an experience that is not easily consumed in a capitalist context. This too is readable in Schlusser's work, where the anti-theatricality provides space for individual readings; snippets overheard in one corner of the audience will not be heard by the other. In this way, the theatrical event is arguably not able to be commoditised as 'whole'. This is the convergence of the political referents within *M+M* and its formal elements: they are both arguably resistant to consumerist thinking. The complexity of reflexive dramaturgies of adaptation and their political viability is reflected in the work's content and form. Paradoxically, *M+M* was one of the hits of the festival, and

³⁰ "(T)he more we position ourselves outside of the dominant cultural industry and the more we articulate our radical independence, the more we become attractive for that very cultural industry" (Ostermeier in Boenisch 2014b, p. 19).

showed, as Ostermeier laments, that anti-capitalist politics still manage to be commercially appealing. To what, then, can we attribute this willingness of Australian theatre makers working with text to engage with these dramaturgies that allow the dialectics of spectator and performer, text and performance, capital and resistance to exist simultaneously?

The techniques employed to achieve the dialectic effects, described by Boenisch as reflexive, can be read more broadly in relation to the contemporary art context of metamodernism. This term is used by Timotheus Vermuelen and Robin van den Akker (2010) to describe the development of art, architecture and cinema beyond postmodern discourse. They posit that contemporary artworks exhibit the qualities of the romantic modernists alongside deconstructive postmodern sensibilities:

Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivete' and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity... One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm. (Vermuelen and van den Akker 2010)

This 'sens' that is emerging in the art world is identifiable, too, in the work of Schlusser, not only in the way the work strives for a political positioning of art as resistance, but in the theatrical strategies themselves, the way in which they are set up to fail on one level, but achieve, in their failure, a reflexive meaning. The metamodern sensibility is present in numerous moments through *M+M*, but the Behemoth figure, as explored above, is a clear example: a representation that is incongruously achieved through inadequate materials. Vermuelen and van den Akker provide insight into the thinking behind these reflexive modes: "the reason these artists haven't opted to employ methods and materials better

suited to their mission or task is that their intention is not to fulfill it, but to attempt to fulfill it in spite of its “unfulfillableness” (2010). This is self-evident in the work of Sisters Grimm, but Schlusser too works this way with text. He describes himself as a “bad reader”, stating “preconceptions, misconceptions and generalisations are more valuable than close reading. The practice of preparing the text, or preparing the approach through an exhaustive reading of the text is, at the early stages, not useful for me” (Schlusser 2010, p. 9), what Schlusser, in reference to a scene from the TV show *The Wire*, calls reading with “soft eyes” (2010, p. 9). The metamodern, then, provides a critical framework within which to read the instinct towards text in Schlusser’s work, one that is both committed to the text as the production’s core, and dismissive of its centrality. Metamodern works ‘swing’ between these poles, resulting in a multiplicity of viewpoints. It is important to note here, as the authors do, that this multiplicity is of course one of the key features of postmodern deconstruction. However, in the metamodern “this pluralism and irony are utilized to counter the modern aspiration, while in postmodernism they are employed to cancel it out” (Vermuelen, and van den Akker 2010, p. 10). This thesis takes a clue from Schlusser’s use of Pussy Riot symbolism, and references to Bulgakov’s relationship to the state, throughout this work as to the idealist view of *M+M*; as Croggan describes “the desire to make, the desire to be free, the desire to love, in a world which again and again destroys these possibilities” (Croggan 2013b).

Positioning *M+M* in relation to the metamodern sensibility is not intended to ultimately define the motivations behind Australian artists’ approach to text and politics in theatre, but rather as a further means of elaboration that points to a connection to broader contemporary cross-disciplinary artistic impulses. Defining this epochal shift in relation to these specific works is beyond the scope of my thesis, but by linking metamodernism’s oscillation between poles to the reflexive functioning of text in these examples, I hope to suggest that the foregrounding of medial transmission in the theatre medium represents a significant shift in Australian theatre culture. This shift is one that implies a changed conception of text that has moved beyond illustration and into an awareness of the way in which text can be positioned in theatre to achieve a kind

of dialectical thinking, a re-doubled use of the text itself as a way of exposing the processes of meaning-making inherent to its presentation in the theatre medium, a complex and reflexive mode of dramaturgy that employs (and makes identifiable) text as *material* in the production - an approach that *M+M* exemplifies.

Conclusion

This Chapter has demonstrated how Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's adaptation of the *Master and Margarita*, *M+M*, specifically engages with text not as a literary object to be illustrated through performance, but as a poetic reservoir in production. For this thesis, it therefore epitomises the re-conceptualisation of text as source material. This work is illustrative of a broader dramaturgical practice at work in the case studies this thesis focuses on, that Australian artists are using text in ways that move beyond conventional understandings of text-based works. They foreground medial transmission in ways that draw attention to the text as a text media – disavowing what Weber describes as the theatre medium's transparency and instead aiming for a simultaneity of the fictive and an awareness of how it is being produced. This is of particular pertinence given the recent furor surrounding Australian adaptations of classic (literary and dramatic) material, as it reframes the traditional notion of fidelity to and theatrical authorship of text, providing space for a more clarified understanding of adaptive textual processes. By using Badiou's conception of the elements of theatre, *M+M* was positioned as an 'undoing' of the novel in a way not dissimilar to Fortier's conception of adaptation as "unraveling fixed hegemonic readings". The difference in this adaptation, however, was defined through Schlusser's insistence on the term 'source material' to describe the Bulgakov novel. It framed the foregrounded medial processes and theatrical transformation from text to stage as acknowledging the performance as *thinking with* the text, not just representing it. This advances understanding of how Australian artists are working with textual material more broadly. Boenisch's concept of *Regie* extends

this to include the spectator as an activated participant *watching themselves watching*. This Chapter's suggestion is that this thinking *with* the text by way of reflexive dramaturgy produces the activated, working spectator suggested by Badiou – and that this is a key consequence of the dramaturgies outlined through this thesis. This Chapter also elaborated on the way in which the exposure of the aesthetics of representation in the work, paradoxically, contributes to the thematic sense of a fictive world – a 'feedback loop' that is also present in the fictive rupture in *The Sovereign Wife*, the choral form of *Moving Target* and the interplay of intermedial perspectives in *Tom William Mitchell*. This parallax configuration of a theatrically 'Real' moment was manifest in the Crucifixion scene in *M+M*. This formed the backdrop for a discussion of the adaptation debate in Australian theatre, from which this thesis drew out some questions around authorship and politics, and posed metamodernism as a potential future frame to read the epochal moment from which these techniques emerge.

M+M, as the work furthest from a conventional example of dramatic text-based theatre studied in this thesis, provides an apt concluding case study. This work, which initially prompted my research into contemporary Australian dramaturgies of text, exemplifies the transmission of medial processes characteristic to all theatre, but foregrounded and made present in recent examples of Australian work.

Ultimately, these strategies imply a shifting conception of the possibilities of text in the theatre situation, and that the 'narrowness' of text-based theatre as a category of work misses the full breadth and complexity of how Australian artists are working with text. In concluding this thesis, I return to problematic conceptions of text in an Australian theatre context, and suggest that the ways in which recent productions employ text do not imply a denigration or devaluing of text in theatre, but instead a re-investment in theatre as a medium that stages encounters with text and foregrounds the present mediality of its own processes. This dramaturgy centres the text as a key site for recent developments in theatre form that are playful, open and politically subversive.

Conclusion

In a recent address to the Playwriting Australia national conference, playwright Michael Gow states:

So let's have no more of this writing for performance nonsense. No one calls it "writing for solitary, sad people sitting under a tree". It's poetry. It's not called "writing for people with enough time on their hands to sit in an armchair and read." It's fiction. We write plays, we're dramatists.

Plays get rewritten, yes. So do novels. But who would dare suggest novelists merely provide fodder for editors and publishers? The same must go for us.

So if any writer hears a director or dramaturg or literary manager say "well of course a script is just a springboard/blue print/road map/board game/TV guide *until it's put it on*", remember it's your medium, so step into the ring and say, "with respect, that is such bullshit." (Gow 2016)

The formal implications of this for the state of theatre in Australia are complicated. Gow's statement emerges as another in the series of opinion pieces on the 'adaption debate'. It is arguably responding to the idea that directors, dramaturgs and literary managers use the notion of the plasticity of the performance text to strip playwrights of their authority. This demonstrates one of the key points in an ongoing argument about text's role in theatre, not only in an Australian context, but internationally, as Boenisch points to by stating: "one can hardly imagine a more contested area in the field of theatre arts than what is often (and most of the time disparagingly) called 'director's theatre'" (2015, p. 1). Gow's depiction of the director, dramaturg and literary manager's description of the play text as a "springboard/blue print/road map/board game/TV guide" characterises the perception of a certain lack of care for the text and, implied within that, its writer, as a contributing factor in the production. This is, of

course, an understandable dilemma for a playwright, whose text represents potentially years of hard work. Text - and particularly plays - Gow implies, are at risk of being treated merely as 'fodder' for staging by people with no respect for the position of the dramatist.

As this thesis has explored, text is indeed being used by Australian artists in ways that do not directly align with the historical processes and modes of operation of what Dan Rebellato (2017) calls "the ingrained British practice of subordinating the production to the play", echoing Lehmann's understanding of the subordination of dramatic theatre in relation to the text (2006, p. 21). Rebellato's point, however, locates the particular mode of subordination as a model of British theatre, one we can say is a particularly important model in the Australia too. He points to a shift in contemporary British drama by Simon Stephens, Alice Birch and Alistair McDowall that suggests this model is changing. As is demonstrated in the Australian case studies discussed in this thesis, the suggestion that this shift is a form of disrespect or denigration of text does not reflect the complexity of the artists' engagement with text, or the encounters this engagement produces for the spectator. These artists are, in fact, re-investing in text, foregrounding the inherent mediality of staging text in the theatre medium as a way of responding to the particular thematic interests of their work. This is playing out across multiple strategies and constructions of the use of text in theatre: the pre-written satirical texts of Sisters Grimm; the text that emerged from the experimental collaboration of *Moving Target*; and texts that are not linguistically staged, but form source material for the production's exploration of ideas and politics. Gow's point about the fading of Australian drama from our main stages might be valid³¹, if Australian theatre is defined as pre-written plays by Australian playwrights intended to be staged in ways that are, above all, illustrative of the literary text. A full exploration of this claim is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the suggestion that "writing for performance" is less valid discounts the complexity of the ways in which text is being used in

³¹ Melbourne Theatre Company's recent 4.6 million dollar commitment to foster Australian writers in their "Next Stage" commissioning and development program would suggest, at the very least, that steps are being taken to rectify this precise problem.

emerging dramaturgies and reduces the importance of text's role in performance.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this statement however is its context. Gow presented the Keynote Address at the Playwriting Australia National Play Festival in 2016, delivered to a room of playwrights, directors, actors and dramaturgs. His galvanising language concludes by calling for those in the room to “write plays that are so solid they can inspire the visions of directors, and designers. Let’s be confident enough to write things that are so clear and polished other theatre artists can rethink them, rejig them, show them back to ourselves” (Gow 2016). It is clear here that the thrust of Gow’s speech is encouraging playwrights to create what could be described as more authoritative work. I refer to Gow’s argument here not to dismiss his statements, but to highlight how the terms of debate around text are still mired in questions of authorship and significant issues of moral rights and copyright, when, by analysing the intrinsic medial nature of text’s presentation in theatre, we can instead shift the terms of the debate to just how broadly Australian theatre-makers are working with text already. Many practices in the independent sector are playing with text in ways that challenge the text-based = dramatic formula. While, of course, dealing with this was not in Gow’s remit in his keynote address, it is indicative of the tension concerning text in Australian theatre culture. I opened this thesis with a quotation from Croggan in reference to this exact dilemma. She indicates precisely the narrowness of our conception of text-based theatre and how, in particular reference to *The Rabble*, this is to the detriment of the analysis of the work itself. These are the types of text that this thesis is concerned with, artists who might well say of themselves: “We make theatre with text. But we’re not dramatists.”

As Lehmann suggests, the fundamentally changed literary aspect of theatre disavows an approach to text in theatre as the study of a genre. In his recent examination, *Tragedy and the Dramatic Theatre*, he is cautious to emphasise that:

[T]he definition of a genre which is supposed to include highly concentrated works of antiquity, the labyrinthine dramaturgy of Shakespeare, the abstraction and classical stylization of Racine and Schiller, plays by Georg Büchner, as well as (assuming tragedies stand at issue) the works of Henrik Ibsen, Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill and Heiner Müller – to say nothing of Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe or pieces by Dea Loher and Sarah Kane – such a definition would be doomed to such abstractness. (Lehmann 2016, p. 8)

As described in Chapter One of this thesis, the study of recent examples of Australian theatre is also fraught with the potential for over-simplified uses of text-based theatre as a 'catch-all' term that is doomed to abstractness. In order to move beyond a generic labelling of these works, this thesis demonstrated several currents in recent Australian work relating to the use of text in theatre, conceptualising the functioning of their dramaturgy. Through case studies and a practical application of the concepts developed in this thesis, this project outlines the way in which the foregrounding of medial transmission inherent to the use of text in the theatre medium signals the use of reflexive dramaturgies in recent Australian work, and that these dramaturgies produce an activated, working spectatorship. While Lehmann notes that "theatrical practice holds manifold possibilities for making the theatrical process dawn upon consciousness" (2016, p. 5), the particular strategies used by these works to produce the caesura in their aesthetic representation stem directly from their use of text. This simultaneous investment in and exposure of the fictive processes of text in theatre, through *the foregrounding of their use of text*, represents a significant shift that builds on strategies that have previously been linked to either dramatic or postdramatic theatre paradigms. In specific examples of Australian theatre, this re-investment in the possibilities of text in the theatre situation often reveals a subversive politics that, as Boenisch points to in his analysis of reflexive dramaturgies, includes the dramaturgy of the spectators' recognition of their own medial labour in relation to the text. This radical inclusion of the spectator is, for this thesis, central to these dramaturgies' engagement with contemporary politics. The queering of 'Australian' values in *The Sovereign Wife*, the nagging

fear of terrorism in the everyday of *Moving Target*, the satire of media populism in *Tom William Mitchell*, and *M+M*'s examination of art as political resistance all rely on the spectator's active engagement with the ways in which the use of text is being highlighted in production. The tension between text and its representation onstage is central in these works, even in *M+M*, where no text is dialogically staged. By demonstrating this shift, this thesis considerably expands notions of how text is being used in an Australian context.

To provide a final example of this process at work, I refer to a scene in *Tom William Mitchell* almost directly appropriated from *A Face In The Crowd*. At a climactic moment, Tom proposes on-air to superstar Wendy Thrace instead of to his partner Aidie, who is calling the TV edit of the scene. In production, English pop-rock band Tears For Fears' song "The Working Hour" plays loudly as Thrace enters the stage, the camera tightly follows her and pans out to encompass Tom getting down on one knee. Thrace turns directly to the camera to deliver her line - "Yes Tom, yes, of course I'll marry you". This playful acknowledgement of the stage-managed false sincerity of the proposal in the narrative of the play also points to the artifice of the stage-production, cheekily re-orienting the scene from a theatrical intra-actor staging to a cinematic, for-the-camera one. Following this, Tom and Wendy kiss and the camera zooms in on their faces in a shot which, when they part, reveals Aidie in the background, stunned, watching on, the first time she has been on camera in the show. This ironic filmic technique serves not only to land the most important emotional beat in the scene, but self-consciously to refer to the screenplay, cinematic form. Following this moment, all performers break character except Hannah Goodwin as Aidie, who stumbles forward as the music increases in volume. The performers then strip the stage of the TV and camera apparatuses that the show has up until then relied upon, leaving a bare theatrical space in which the rest of the performance plays out. The multiple levels of text, medial labour, exposure of the means of representation, aesthetic caesura, ironic self-reflexivity and sincere commitment to the fictive cosmos present in this moment are only made possible by foregrounding the inherent intermediality of text in theatre. By exploring such moments, and the other productions that prompted this study, this thesis

outlines how the term text-based theatre does not account for Australian artists' interest in creating specific encounters with textual material by foregrounding theatre as a reflexive site of medial transmission.

Chapter Two, building on Chapter One's explication of fundamental theoretical concepts relevant to this thesis, outlined how reflexivity in the dramaturgy of these works produces an encounter with the text for the spectator, activating a critical engagement with its representation. Chapter Three linked these strategies to the changing nature of theatrical authorship in collaborative modes, unpacking how the interwoven nature of text and production in these works indicates the significance of the playwright as a collaborating craftsman. Chapter Four consisted of an account of my practical project that explored intermediality, not only as a consequence of digital technologies in performance, but as an innate feature of staging text in the theatre medium and, in doing so, highlighted the ways in which the mediation of text is made present and identifiable as a surface in contemporary dramaturgies. The final Chapter pushed the definition of text in theatre beyond the verbal, analysing the way in which theatre responds to textual material in manifold ways which re-orient conceptions of adaption and textual fidelity. In doing so, I have sought to contribute to the conceptualisation of textual dramaturgies in contemporary Australian theatre and thereby extend the criteria employed to assess the use of text in these formally disparate but fascinating theatre works.

Further research in this field would benefit from a broader scope of analysis, delving into the work of The Rabble, Adena Jacobs, Zoe Coombs-Marr, Black Lung Theatre and Whaling Firm and The Hayloft Project alongside those studied here. Younger emerging artists too, are developing on and implementing these strategies - re:group performance collective and the theatre texts of Kirby Medway utilise similarly playful modes of performance. Such an examination reveals the widespread application of this approach to textual material in an Australian context. As I have aimed to make clear, these dramaturgies are not simply empty experiments, but thoroughly connected to the politics of the productions themselves. Throughout this thesis, I have pointed to these

dramaturgical modes' connection to the political intent of the artists studied, aiming to emphasise how they seek to produce a politics of active spectatorship and critical engagement with text. For this thesis, this is a theatre of text that is open and dynamic, representing a significant aesthetic development that is playing out across multiple stages. It is a mode of dramaturgy that signals a changing conception of text's role in theatre - not as the sole focus of production, but as a re-invigorated site of theatre's potential to be subversive, rich, playful, reflexive and, most importantly, politically motivated.

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Appendix – *Tom William Mitchell* play-text.

Full show footage provided in DVD format.

Also available for viewing online at:

<https://vimeo.com/261407293>

password: tomwilliammitchell

TOM WILLIAM MITCHELL
by Mark Rogers

August 6, 2017.

HOWARD BEALE

I want you to get out of your chairs and go to your window. Right now. I want you to go to window, open it, stick your head out and yell. I want you to yell: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

Network by Paddy Chayevsky, directed by Sidney Lumet, 1976.

GENERAL HAINSWORTH

Let us not forget that in TV we have the greatest instrument for mass persuasion in the history of the world.

A Face in the Crowd by Budd Schulberg, directed by Elia Kazan, 1957.

UBS News.

Thomas William Mitchell – 28 at outset.
Aidie Roberts – Executive Producer of News at UBS, 32.
Marty Calvin – Executive Senior Vice President UBS, 49.
Network – UBS Executive Officer, Chairman of UBS board.
Alison Richards – UBS on air presenter and reporter, 30.
Graham Vanderbilt – Operations Intern at UBS, 24.
Director – Director at UBS news.
Stage Manager – Stage Manager, UBS news.
Tony Jones – QandA Host.

Politicians.

Simon Abrahams – Minister for Social Services, 45.
James Caroline – Shadow Minister for Social Services, 45.

Civilians.

Wendy Thrace – Actor, 23.
Zahr Kamissa – Student, 19.
Eliot Rosen – Parent, 38.
Joey Johns – Financial Speculator, 35.
Fan 1
Fan 2
Fan 3

Post Collapse

Johnny – A waiter on the Queen Analeese.
Concierge – Concierge on the Queen Analesse.
Pirate 1
Pirate 2
Pirate 3
Holly Rhodes – An Intern with SBS underground pirate radio.
Woman – A lone wolf, thriving in her new environment.

This play can be performed by any number of people, but nine would work well. Suggested doubling:

Actor 1 – Tom William Mitchell
Actor 2 – Aidie Roberts
Actor 3 – Network
Actor 4 – Alison Richards/Zahr Kamissa/Fan 2/Pirate 2/Woman
Actor 5 – Simon Abrahams/Fan 1/Pirate 1
Actor 6 – Marty Calvin/Joey Johns/Eliot Rosen/Fan 3/Pirate 3
Actor 7 – Wendy Thrace/Stage Manager/Holly Rhodes
Actor 8 – Graham Vanderbilt/Tony Jones/Johnny
Actor 9 - Director/James Caroline/Concierge

Australian television and politics are not as ethnically and culturally diverse as they should be. I encourage the producer not to repeat this kind of exclusion when casting this play.

A note on cameras.

The sections of this play set in a news studio rely on a clear delineation of the characters' on-air and off-air performances. In the absence of actual live cameras and screens to delineate this, some method of indicating when the scene is going out public will be needed. In the text, this is indicated by an "on-air" or "off-air" stage direction.

A note on titles.

This play uses the screenplay form of titling to locate the action of each scene. These do not have to be used in production, but can be a helpful way of avoiding indicating place and time naturalistically.

/ indicates point of interruption.

// indicates a simultaneous thought spoken at the same time.

A character name followed by no dialogue indicates an unspoken thought or the active choice not to say anything.

CAPITALS don't always mean louder.

Scene 1.

INT. UBS News Studio. Day.

Tom stands in the middle of the room. A camera is pointing at his face. Aidie is at the tech desk, watching him on-screen.

Aidie. For the camera.

Tom. Thomas William Mitchell.

Aidie. Again.

Tom. My name is Thomas William Mitchell

Aidie. Tom Mitchell. Someone in high school once told me people with two first names couldn't be trusted.

Tom. Right, because it's Aidie Roberts isn't it?

Aidie. So?

Tom. Sorry?

Aidie. Can you be trusted?

Tom. Yes, yes I'd like to think I'm a very-

Aidie. *(to the techies)* Can we get a little closer on him please?

Tom. I was just going to-

Aidie. Quiet.

Pause.

Aidie. Ok.

Tom. Should I stay looking at the camera?

Aidie. Always.

The techies laugh.

Aidie. Now. Why do you want to work in television?

Tom. Because it's the medium of the century. If you want to make a difference in the world you-

Aidie. Stop.

Tom. Should I stop?

Aidie. (to the techies) They always want to make a difference don't they?

The techies laugh.

Tom. That's all you want me to- I feel like I've stuffed something up.

Aidie. No. Please read from the teleprompter.

Tom. Just read- like I'm-

Aidie. Just read them. Yes.

Tom reads from the teleprompter.

Tom. 50, 000 dead in Palestine. US ambassador missing. Car-bomb goes off in Kabul, 13 dead, over thirty injured. The Queen has abdicated. 20 000 dead in Russian exodus. UK Prime Minister steps in as UN secretary general. Peacekeepers attract ire as IED's continue to pound the walls of the embassy. Australian Zoologist finds cure for Lion cancer.

A tech runs on and equips Tom with a floppy army issue hat and a microphone.

Aidie. Don't stop.

Tom. Sorry am I meant to just-

Aidie. Keep going.

Tom keeps reading. The teleprompter has been moved. The camera he is meant to be speaking to has changed.

Tom. Chinese officials have hushed up claims that their decision to allow casino mogul Alfred Holiday to construct a holiday resort in the forbidden palace has effected their bid for the 2018 Olympic games. Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Jordan, Egypt, Andalusia, Glasgow, Arkansas, Australia, Timor Leste, Indonesia, Equatorial Gunea, Lithuania, Rwanda, America, USA, the US, 50,000 dead,

The techs are actively trying to distract Tom, the teleprompter is being run all around the studio. The cameras are changing too fast for Tom to catch the right one. They are all yelling at him.

Tom. President, Prime Minister, Ambassador, Minister, Minister for health, Foreign Minister, school shooting, panic, exploded, January, massacre, festival, celebrations, rape camp, charged, world cup, Sydney Swans, belching, dildo experiment, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt.

An industrial size fan is brought in and turned on. Tom is buffeted by the wind, he can't quite keep his hat on, they start blowing rubbish, plastic bags and dust into his face as he continues to try to read.

Tom. Angelina and Brad Pitt, hammerhead sharks, bottled water, in my opinion, what I reckon, who's to say, it isn't as simple as that, listen up folks, smash hit single, bike lanes, tax, tax, taxes, taxing, taxed up the wahzoo, risotto, 5 stars, money,

The sound of gunfire and bombs fills the room. The techs yell "get down, get the fuck down!" and drop to the floor. Tom follows them. He is screaming now.

Tom. Nasdaq, the atmosphere here is electric as people start to cannibalise their neighbours, I've never been as excited. ow, it's just wow, Sandra, I can't describe it, the lights over the harbour, Merry Christmas and a ho ho ho to all the kids, legalised marijuana, how much is your drop costing you, too much. Outrage. Outrage. Outrage.

The gunfire stops. The techs leave. Tom is alone on the floor speaking to the camera. He's making it up now, there is no teleprompter. Aidie walks into the space and watches him.

Tom. My name is Michael Klim and I swim butterfly, Jim, on a whim I've slimmed him

down to fit all the swimming in. 1, 3, 7, 1, 2, 3, 3, 6, 8, 200. Jesus Christ, potato salad with a dill cream cheese.

Aidie. Stop.

He leaps to his feet.

Tom. Christ.

Aidie. Just a few more questions.

Tom. Sorry but that was insane.

Aidie. Do you have any experience in TV?

Tom. I was on Australian survivor. I came fourth.

Aidie. Name a difficult or stressful time in your life and how you worked to overcome it.

Tom. Does this interview count?

Aidie. Do you have anything you're really passionate about?

Tom. Telling stories

Aidie. Thrilling.

Tom. I don't know what you want me to say, you seem quite angry with me.

Aidie. Everybody wants to tell stories.

Tom. Isn't that the job?

Aidie. The job is to find the story

Tom. The story.

Aidie. The big one.

Tom. What makes it the story and not just any story then?

Aidie. The story that completely changes the way we think about the world. The story after which there won't be a world the same way we think about it now. Something that shows us the real truth of everything. The fucking real story. That's journalism's job. The

truth. Not that you'd know anything about that.

Tom. I do.

Aidie. Australian Survivor?

Tom. Sure but-

Aidie. Ok thanks Tom we've got your contacts.

The techs run back on and begin cleaning up the space.

Tom. That was the interview?

Aidie. We're seeing a lot of people, we need to reset.

Tom. Seeing how fast I can read, throwing rocks at my head?

Aidie. Pity more didn't hit you, if you ask me. I don't like having my time wasted.

Tom. I'm not trying to waste your time, I want this job.

Aidie. Why?

Tom. Why?

Aidie. Yes, why? Why would you want a job that you are manifestly under qualified for and seemingly uninterested in? What possible reason could you have to want to be on TV news?

Tom. Cos it's dying. Isn't it? TV's dying.

Tom grabs one of the cameras and turns it back on Aidie and the techs. They stop what they're doing. He films them as he speaks.

Tom. It's dying because the people like you, the people who run TV, are lying, manipulative fakes more interested in sex scandals and celebrity hook ups than actual journalism. Truth? Really? The media's relationship to truth has disappeared. It's all content now isn't it? Clicks. Like farms and news-entertainment. That's why you're even interviewing someone like me, what are my qualifications? A pretty face? The whole thing's a joke. Everyone knows it. And yet, by some miracle, we can't can look away. 61 years since Bruce Gyngell said 'Welcome to Television' and we're still watching. You'd

think we would have got bored, Christ it's boring enough. But no. We still sit down, whole families, dinner on our laps. It's like meditation. No other medium connects us that way. So, if I want to make a difference, and yes I do want to make a difference no matter how cynical and jaded and over it you might be, the place to do it is on television. That's why I'm here. That's the truth.

A pause.

Aidie. What's your name again?

Tom. Thomas William-

Aidie. Shorter is better, just Tom.

Tom. Tom William Mitchell.

Scene 2.

INT. UBS News Studio. Night.

Off-air.

Alison. Skim flat and a muffin please.

Graham. No worries.

Stage manager. Two minutes!

Director. Ok so first Alison's going to throw it across to you, it's the one shot. It pans to you. Ok? Alison will say.

Alison. Now over to blah blah for an interesting development in the world of film.

Director. Great, got that?

Tom. Actually is it ok if-

Director. That's your cue.

Tom. Yep and that's once-

Director. Once it pans to you, yes? And you say-

Tom. Blah blah.

Director. What it says on the prompter.

Alison. Can you read?

Tom. I can read.

Director. How long?

Stage manager. One minute thirty.

Director. Practice.

Alison. Now over to Thomas Mitchell-

Tom. Sorry. If you could just-

Alison. //Jesus.

Director. //What?

Tom. Tom William Mitchell. Say Tom William Mitchell. It's my moniker.

Director. Your what?

Tom. What I want to be called, it's my first time so-

Director. Alison.

Alison. Now over to Tom William Mitchell for an interesting development in the world of film.

Tom. Thanks Alison, I'm Tom William Mitchell and-

Alison laughs.

Director. You don't need to say your name, she just said your name. How long?

Stage manager. 30 seconds.

Director. Can you read?

Tom. Why do people keep asking that?

Director. Just fucking read then, you're doing the celeb videos ok? Just do the celeb videos.

Stage Manager. 10, 9, 8, 7

Tom. I'm a journalist.

Stage Manager. 6, 5, 4,

Alison. Jesus Christ kid.

Stage manager gestures 3, 2, 1 with their fingers.

On air.

Alison. Welcome back. And now over to Henry Henderson for an interesting development in the world of film.

Tom. Thanks Alison. Golden girl Wendy Thrace has come clean about her issues with drugs. She appeared, with her family beside her, on E! Entertainment news earlier today.

Wendy Thrace clip is played. She is on-air. Tom and Alison are off-air as they speak. This overlaps.

Wendy Thrace. I acknowledge that my actions in the past have been regrettable. I'm sorry for all the people I have let down. I know now that I need to face my demons, not hide from them. This is a real wake up call and I'm seeking professional help. I hope this does not lead others down the dark path I have taken.

next tag?

Alison. You're such a little weiner.

Tom. I can't believe we're running this vapid bullshit.

Director. Just read the prompter shithead.

Tom. Can you please call me Tom in the

Alison. God, she's such a trollop.

On air.

Tom. And those demons presumably take the name of Cocaine and Alcohol. Alison, do you think our tolerance for star's bad behavior has gone too far?

Alison. There's no doubting Wendy is a fantastic actress, and it's so sad to see her like this. But I think these people need to remember that they're role models.

Tom. They should set a better example.

Alison. I think so.

Tom. Take yourself.

Alison. I don't know about that.

Tom. There's no need to be modest. I'm sure there are plenty of people in the world glad to have you as their inspiration. And that's a big pressure. Big pressure. And you don't need coke or booze to handle it, do you?

Alison. Well.

Tom. You don't use cocaine do you Alison?

Alison. No, I don't use cocaine.

Tom. Of course and I just wanted to make a comparison here between you and Wendy Thrace. She's a, what did you call her in the break? A trollop? And you're a quality journalist. But either way we don't need to know about whether you use cocaine, we don't need to know whether Wendy Thrace uses cocaine. Does she do her job and act well? Yes. Do you do your job and read the news well? Yes. Wendy Thrace shouldn't be sorry for her actions any more than you should be sorry for calling me Thomas, it's Tom by the way. If you ask me, I think our tolerance for star's behavior hasn't gone far enough, in fact it shouldn't matter in the slightest. And it certainly shouldn't be newsworthy. I'm Tom William Mitchell, and we're UBS News. Goodnight.

They tensely shuffle their papers until-

Off air.

Director. What the fuck did you think you were doing motherfucker?

Tom. To be honest, I was just trying to bring something else to the debate.

Alison. You want honesty?

Tom. I mean yes, don't we all.

Alison. You want an honest piece of debating, bitch? Fuck yourself.

Graham. Alison, I've got your skim flat and your muffin here.

Alison. I don't want to eat this bullshit now Graham. I am having a meltdown.

Graham. No worries.

Alison. Fuck. Yourselves.

She leaves, flipping everyone the bird.

Marty comes out.

Marty. You're fucking gone!

Tom. Marty, I-

Aidie. Marty you can't fire him.

Marty. After something like that, yes I can.

Aidie. For speaking his mind?

Marty. You don't speak your mind on TV.

Tom. The last words of the media giant.

Marty. Listen shithead-

Aidie. He spoke his mind and look! Look. The viewers fucking love him.

Marty. They love a fuck up. That's all.

Aidie. "Such a thrill finally to have someone say what they're thinking, this guy Tom is my hero". There are thousands of these.

Marty. Twitter. Who cares?

Tom. The last words of the media giant.

Marty. You fucken-

Aidie. Marty.

Marty. Aidie. He's gone. (to Tom) You're gone, shithead. I gotta answer to the Network.

Tom. Last words of the-

Marty. You're fired.

He leaves.

Aidie. I need a drink.

Scene 3.

INT. Bar. Midnight Special. Night.

Tom and Aidie are both on their phones. Joey is at the bar.

Tom. Holy shit.

Aidie. Listen to this one. "Couldn't think of someone better for the job than Tom".

Tom. "I urge Tom William Mitchell to come to a group meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, his defence of Wendy Thrace was inspiring".

Aidie. "Seems to me that the current obsession with Tom William Mitchell is totally justifiable. This is a fascinating, talented, extraordinary individual"

Tom. Fucking hell.

Aidie. There's mountains of sexist shit being said about Alison too.

Tom. Look.

He shows her his phone.

Aidie. Very appealing.

Tom. My DM's are insane.

Aidie. What about this one. "Have you soon Tom William Mitchell eat the world's spiciest pie?"

Tom. What?

Aidie. I know.

Tom. What the fuck is happening?

Aidie. They like you.

Tom. One Buzzfeed article, then I'll disappear forever.

Aidie. At least you're famous.

Tom. Cold comforts.

Aidie. “Can’t wait to see what he does tomorrow!” That’s from Wendy Thrace herself

Tom. I’ll be trying to figure out which items in my shitty apartment I can sell in order to make rent, Wendy, thanks for asking.

Aidie. How does it feel to have the world cheering you on?

Tom. Feels like I’m out of a job.

Aidie. They don’t know that.

Tom. Fuck if I’d just kept my mouth shut maybe-

Aidie. They don’t want you to keep your mouth shut.

She grabs his phone. Points it at him.

Aidie. Do the thing.

Tom. What?

Aidie. Speak.

Tom. I don’t think it’ll make any difference.

Aidie. I’m already filming.

Tom. Don’t.

Aidie. It’s facebook. You’re live.

Tom. What?

Aidie. Action!

Tom. Cut.

Aidie. What are you a pussy?

A pause.

Tom grabs the phone. Points it at himself. Likes and love hearts and angry reacts float across the screen.

On air.

Tom. Um. Hi. So, I was fired. Thanks to everyone who's written to me the past few hours. Mandy420xcx especially, thanks for your support. Anyway, I was fired and honestly I don't care, TV is the most compromised, soulless, vapid institution we have in this country. But everything's the same. Twitter's the fucking same. Facebook's the same, it's all the endless nauseating spread of content and comment, content and comment. Free yourself! Get off the screen! This thing you're looking at on the train or on the couch scared that when Netflix asks you if you want to keep watching you'll see your empty, hideous face reflected in the now black surface of your Macbook. Even now you're watching me, why? What do I have to say? Nothing. I have NOTHING TO SAY. This IS MORE OF THE SAME BULLSHIT. But it feels good to say so: hey what's Marty's number?

Aidie. 0404282079

Tom. If you want to call and talk to the person responsible for my dismissal, give 0404282079 a buzz. Tell them how you feel. Ok, bye guys, like and subscribe, love you, byeeeeeeeeeeee.

Off-air.

Tom. Fuck yeah!

Aidie. You gotta give em a show.

Tom. Thanks.

Aidie. No problem.

A nice pause.

Tom. Hey, so I was wondering if maybe you'd like to-

Aidie's phone rings.

Aidie. It's the heads. Wait here.

She leaves to take the call. Tom misses his chance.

Joey stands up and gets Tom's attention.

Joey. Do you know me?

Tom. No?

Joey. No. You don't. But I've got something to say. And when a mad bastard at the pub says they have something to say to you, it's always gonna be of profound importance. Don't you watch the movies?

Tom. Fine.

Joey. Do you know how much this watch cost?

Tom. One hundred thousand dollars.

Joey. It was a gift. Free.

Tom. Great.

Joey. She loved me, you understand. So she got me this. But I had to work for it. I gave her love, family, everything. I'm a husk, you understand? But do you think I care?

Tom. No?

Joey. No. I don't. Because look at it.

JOEY shows TOM the watch, it glints wonderfully.

Joey. Things don't just happen. You make em happen. You gotta work for your gifts.

Tom. Right.

Joey. I told you, Mr Newsworthy. Profound importance.

Joey leaves.

Aidie comes back in laughing.

Aidie. They want you on Q and A tomorrow night.

Tom. What?

Aidie. They want you on QandA.

Tom. How? This is- I'm not fired?

Aidie. No way man, look at these views.

Tom. What about Marty?

Aidie. Wasn't Marty on the phone.

Tom. Who was it?

Aidie. The network.

Tom drops to his knees.

Tom. Thank you lord network for blessing me with this second coming!

Aidie. Hey, I did alright too you know.

Tom. Q and fucking A!

Aidie. What are you going to say?

Tom. No idea.

Aidie. Well, that's gonna suck.

Scene 4.

INT. UBS News Studio Set, QandA. Night.

Simon Abrahams, Wendy Thrace, James Caroline, Tony Jones and Tom are seated on a panel. Questions are asked from the audience.

On air.

Zahr. This question is for the whole panel. What's next? How do we get better? What do we do?

Tony Jones. Zahr Kamissa with a question there. Abstract. Now, how about some answers. Simon Abrahams, minister for social services.

Abrahams. Great question. Important. Important question. Now. Caroline here and no doubt Mr. Mitchell will take the opposition's position that the way forward is to fix the budget. That's all they think about. The budget. They've made this deficit problem so huge that-

Caroline. Sorry we haven't made the deficit problem.

Abrahams. Can I finish?

Caroline. I'm sorry but I simply must respond to that. We haven't made a deficit problem. The government has made this problem themselves as evidenced by the massive hole in their latest budget.

Abrahams. Budget budget. Think about this: new schools, roads, hospitals. You say you're about small business, why won't you let us build new roads for people to get to new business.

Half-arsed applause.

Caroline. This massive hole in the budget, means we'll never get those schools, never get those roads. We have to empower people, not talk down to them with handouts.

Half-arsed applause.

Tony Jones. I don't think we've quite answered Zahr's question. Wendy Thrace, what's

next for you in the world of film.

Wendy Thrace. Well, when you make a movie, you try to make it entertaining for the most number of people. You make it appeal to everyone with action, a love story, family, heroes and villains, a proper journey. I think politics can learn a lot from movies. Think about what's best for the most number of people and do that. That's something I really try to live by.

Tony Jones. Tom Mitchell.

Tom. Well first off they're all wrong.

Small pause.

Tom. Sorry what was the question again?

Tony Jones. What do we do?

Abrahams. Wake up Mr Mitchell.

Tom. What do we do with the current situation in government, is that right?

Abrahams. Go on. If we're all wrong. What's the right answer. Show us all up, Mr Mitchell.

Tom. Um. Well I'm not sure it's up to me. I mean sometimes simply asking the questions can-

Abrahams. Nothing. Do nothing is your answer.

Tom. No. I mean, actually-

Caroline. First and foremost I think we need to be thinking about the budget.

Abrahams. Who among us feels that things ought to change?

Cheers.

Abrahams. Who among us is unsatisfied with the way things are?

Cheers

Abrahams. What do you say to that?

Tom. I don't have anything to say Simon.

Abrahams. The media's new golden boy struck dumb. I thought we were going to be treated to one of your trade-mark speeches. I was looking forward to it. But here you are saying we should all do nothing. Very disappointing.

Tom. Well there's nothing to be done, is there? I mean it's over. The climate will boil us alive in 50 years.

Tony Jones. You think the human race is finished.

Tom. It's not a question of what I think.

Wendy Thrace. I think I've seen a film with a similar plot to what you're describing.

Tom. If you added Children of Men to 2012 and The Day After Tomorrow, plus a few of the earlier bits of Interstellar and then the scene in the village from Come and See. You wouldn't even be close.

Wendy. I haven't seen that last one.

Tom. It's Russian.

Zahr. I don't think that's- sorry.

Tony Jones. Zahr, a follow up.

Zahr. I don't think that's what I meant when I said what do we do. I'm scared about those same things, but I want something to hang onto, some hope. I don't know what to do. What do you say to me?

Tom. To you? Do whatever the fuck you want. Let's stop the fantasy that we can do anything or make any real difference. That's what I would say.

Tony Jones. Ok moving on. Ms. Eliot Rosen. A question?

Eliot Rosen stands up. She appears nervous.

Eliot Rosen. My son has cancer.

Abrahams. I'm so so sorry to hear that but-

Tony Jones. Let's let her finish but we may have to take this as a comment.

Eliot Rosen. I am here to try to make a difference. And I believe, that to do this, one must use force. Nobody listens to silence. You have to use whatever force is necessary. The reforms proposed in the budget must be rejected. I came here to do something about it.

Abrahams. Again, I'm sorry for your son but these reforms, as you know, are completely necessary.

Tom. Sorry, I'm just curious, what did you come here to do Ms. Rosen?

Eliot Rosen. My life is of no consequence.

Tom. Ms. Rosen could you please open your jacket?

Eliot Rosen. My jacket?

Tom. Yes could you please open your jacket. Slowly please. For the camera.

Commotion. It's a dirty bomb. A mess of wire and plastic. Rosen holds a mobile phone in the air, the detonator, her finger poised to dial.

Eliot Rosen. My son has been tortured by his pain for a year. We can only afford clinic treatment. The minister wants to close those clinics. I will not watch him die. They have to know. They have to know how much this matters. The online wiki guide said to expect many casualties if detonated within a confined space.

Abrahams. Miss, please. I assure you, this government-

Eliot Rosen. Your reforms do not discriminate. They hurt all. So will I. I will show them the violence of these reforms.

Wendy Thrace. This feels like a movie.

Eliot Rosen. I don't want to hurt people, but this must be answered. I want to know, from the panel. Tom, you say nothing can change. But I want things to change. What should I do?

Pause.

Tom. Do whatever the fuck you want.

Commotion.

Tony Jones. //Now hang on a minute.

Abrahams. //No!

Wendy. //No please don't.

Caroline. //The budget.

Eliot Rosen. This violence is nothing. The great violence is all.

Tom. Do it then.

Tony Jones. Don't.

Eliot Rosen. I love my son.

Tom. I think you should do it.

Abrahams. DO YOU WANT US ALL TO DIE?

Tom. I don't. But she does. Who am I to stand in her way? Ms. Rosen is right, if she blows us all to hell people will have to listen. Maybe the clinics will stay open, maybe her son will get to live. Or maybe not, maybe they'll board them up anyway. Maybe tomorrow we'll wake up in a police state, more of a police state. I don't know. What I do know is Ms. Rosen is the only one among us who's got any guts, who's got the strength to stand by her convictions. Bravo! I applaud you, I do, really.... BUT. But I will say this. I think Simon hit the nail on the head. The most radical, the most powerful, the most realistic thing to do in the current climate is nothing. Or more precisely to do whatever the fuck you want. Eat whatever you want, listen to whatever weird music you want. Be yourself. This is the cosmic irony of capitalism, what it wants us to do more than anything is the thing that will destroy it. Let me explain: Capitalism is broken. We all know it. It's fucked, we know it has to die, and we always want to fix it, we keep trying to fix it all the time, Ms. Rosen is trying to fix it today with a homemade bomb, but it just gets stronger. It is, and this shows how much of a nerd I am, it's Kirby in super smash brothers, it's that massive thing in Akira, everything we throw at it, it consumes and gets stronger. We try to protest, it sells the materials we make signs from and then sells newspapers with our faces on it. We try to opt out and build our own communities, it makes its own gated communities and buys our land off us for millions. We give money to the poor and starving, great, it thinks, we don't have to do that now, scratch that off our list of problems. We try to become more radically connected, more open with each other online, and it makes money from the devices we need to do that. From every click. From each micro-transaction. It has no mind, it has no ideas, we have ideas and it takes them,

it eats our ideas and makes new markets from them. How soon until Eliot Rosen commemorative mugs are available on ebay? Tomorrow morning I bet. So stop. Let's stop. What's the point? Let's stop the fantasy that we can do anything that will make any real difference. And, and, and, this is the point, by not doing anything, we do everything. Capitalism is broken, remember. And what happens to broken things if you insist on continuing to use them? They fall apart. So let's let this thing take its course. Let's do nothing, which means, doing whatever the fuck we want, and let's let the calamity come. Because only once the calamity comes and the past is truly gone, can something new and wonderful begin to form.

It's up to you.

Pause. Eliot lowers her hand. Puts the mobile phone on the ground, unstraps the bomb. She stands straight and looks at Tom.

Eliot Rosen. Thank you.

A huge gunshot. Rosen has been taken out by security. Or maybe it was Tony Jones. She collapses to the floor.

Silence.

Tom giggles.

Massive applause.

Scene 5.

INT. Green Room, UBS. Night.

People are milling about, drinking and chatting.

Aidie. Oh my god, Tom.

Tom. Yeah.

Aidie. Great show.

Tom. We almost died, but yeah. //The show!

Aidie. //The show! Holy shit!

Tom. Did you get the bit where I noticed her jacket?

Aidie. I was cutting between you and the little bit of wire poking out while Abrahams was trying to respond to her!

Tom. I was trying to catch your-

Aidie. I saw! I saw.

Tom. You're amazing.

Awkward is this a hug, a handshake or a high five moment.

Tom. The story!

Aidie. What?

Tom. It was the story.

Aidie. That wasn't even remotely remotely close to being the story.

Tom. Bugger.

Aidie. You'll know it when you see it.

Tom. I hope so.

Aidie. I gotta get back in there but fuck! Great show!

Aidie leaves.

Zahr swoops over.

Zahr. Hi. I loved what you said.

Tom. Thanks heaps.

Zahr. I literally had never thought of it that way. Do whatever you want! Fuck yeah. Stop fighting it!

Tom. I mean, yeah it's a bit more-

Graham, an intern comes over.

Graham. Tom can I get your signature on this?

Zahr. Literally do whatever you want, that's the solution.

Abrahams comes over too.

Abrahams. Nice work Mr Mitchell.

Graham. Hi Simon.

Abrahams. I really thought we were finished in there.

Tom. Me too.

Zahr. Me three oh my god I was literally dying.

Graham. Simon?

Abrahams. We all almost did literally die!

Graham. OK SO YOU'RE NOT GOING TO ACKNOWLEDGE ME AT ALL THEN?

Abrahams. Yes, uh, Hello Graham.

Graham. Wow, thanks.

Graham leaves in a huff. A weird pause.

Zahr. What was that about?

Abrahams. So that was a close call back there huh?

Tom. Yep.

Abrahams. Trust the media's golden boy to have a nice line in bullshit.

Tom. Wasn't bullshit.

Abrahams. Sounded like it.

Zahr. Did you even listen to what he said?

Tom. Simon's just a little jealous.

Abrahams. Populism can only take you so far my boy.

Tom. It's treated you pretty well.

Abraham. I'm a man of the people.

Tom. Rich people.

Graham comes back over.

Graham. Tom, sorry.

Abrahams. Think I'll check out the hors deves.

Graham. (arsehole)

Abrahams.

Abrahams wanders over to the nibbles.

Tom. It's your life. We shouldn't be judging you just for the clicks.

Zahr. "And it certainly shouldn't be newsworthy" You're both so brave.

Wendy. So do you really think that? What you said?

Zahr. Um, yes he does.

Wendy. About how nothing matters and we should just do whatever we want and that's the best way to like fix social issues.

Zahr. Obviously he does, Wendy. Can I call you Wendy?

Tom. I mean, yeah. Make things bad enough, eventually things have to change for the better right? That's what I was trying to-

Wendy. I get it.

Tom. I'm just glad it came out making sense to people.

Wendy. Hey can you go get me a glass of red?

Zahr. But TV week said you're just out of rehab.

Wendy. Pinot Noir if it's there. Thanks.

Zahr. So cool! I'm getting Wendy Thrace a glass of red!

She leaves to do just that.

Tom. Are you sure, I mean, your agent-

Wendy. You said it man, I'm just living it.

Tom. Cool. That's-

Wendy. How does it feel?

Tom. What?

Wendy. Having that kind of power.

Zahr from across the room, yells.

Zahr. HEY TOM LOOK.

Everyone does.

She runs up to Simon Abrahams.

... and kicks him in the balls.

Abrahams. WHY DID YOU DO THAT?

Zahr. I do whatever the fuck I want.

Abrahams. WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?

Zahr. LET THE CALAMITY COME.

WOOO. Chaos as people start downing drinks and getting mega loose. Fuck it!

Abrahams. I'll get you Mitchell. I'll fucken ruin you.

Abrahams waddles out.

Tom. Good.

Wendy. Hmm?

Tom. It feels- yeah- pretty fucking good.

PARTY. Windows get smashed. It's a riot.

Scene 6.

Title. Weeks later.

EXT. Courthouse. Day.

On air.

Abrahams. I'm excited to see that justice has been done, we can't live in a country where everyone goes around saying whatever they want to say regardless of the consequences and I think today, the court has shown that

Alison. Welcome back, the trial of Tom William Mitchell came to a dramatic conclusion today with his conviction for inciting a riot. After coming under criticism in parliament from Minister for Social Services Simon Abrahams, a civil suit was brought against Mr Mitchell for his quote reckless statements on Q and A. Flanked by his colleagues and supporters, he left the courtroom earlier today and returned to UBS studios.

Now we see Tom and Aidie, pushing past protestors and supporters. Tom is saying:

Tom. A monstrous injustice has been done today, not only to me but to free speech and personal sovereignty. Simon Abrahams should be ashamed of himself.

Off air.

Tom and Aidie push past and escape the masses, making it inside the UBS building. It's pretty busy feeling.

INT. First Floor Foyer, UBS, DAY.

Aidie. Shouldn't have said anything.

Tom. Story of my fucking life.

Graham. Skim flat?

Aidie. Ta.

Tom. Cheers mate. Lovely.

Graham. Oh, and Marty's coming down.

Aidie. Coming down?

Graham. Yeah she said she'd-

Aidie. Fuck. Distract her.

Graham. What?

Tom. Why?

Aidie. If she's coming down she's coming to fire you.

Tom. What?

Aidie. Marty doesn't come down, ok? I've never even seen her on this floor.

Graham. She said she'd be 2 minutes.

Aidie. Graham, please.

Graham. She's my boss.

Aidie. I'm your boss. She's my boss. If you do it it's cos I told you, ok?

Graham. Ok but-

Aidie. Talk shit, spill coffee, I don't know. You good?

Graham. I don't know.

Aidie. Initiative, Graham.

Graham. Fucking hell.

He leaves to intercept Marty

Tom. What do we do?

Aidie. You gotta go over Marty's head. Take the stairs.

Tom. Where?

Aidie. The 39th.

Tom. The network head?

Aidie. He saved you once.

Tom. Fucking hell.

Aidie. Find me after ok?

Graham. MARTY!

Marty comes on. Tom and Aidie bolt.

Graham tries to get in Marty's road. He might spill coffee on her (on purpose). He might then say: "fuck, sorry". Which could be funny. Or maybe Marty just completely blanks him and he's left having failed in his mission. He might then say, "fuck" to himself for being a shit intern.

Scene 7.

INT. 39th Floor UBS. Office of the Network Head. Day.

The Network Head is dressed in a Grecian Robe. There is a fern in the room. He looks at his watch, then counts silently down (3, 2, 1) to cue Tom's entrance.

Tom enters. Sees the Network Head in his robe. WTF?

Tom. Sir, I'm sorry to barge in here like this but-

Network. Tom, wonderful. Sit down.

Tom. Sit?

There is no chair.

Network. Please.

Tom sits.

Network. I'm glad you could make the meeting.

Tom. Meeting? Sorry I, Aidie must have, I thought I was going to get fired.

Network. Mmh. Mmh Mmh..... That depends.

Tom. Oh.

Network.

Tom. On what?

Network. How did the trial end?

Tom. I was convicted, I've been fined a considerable amount of money, I have to do community-

Network. I see.

Tom. Sir I think it would be a mistake to let me go after something like this, it'll appear like the station is bowing to political pressure.

Network. Mmh.

Tom. We need to present ourselves as independent.

Network. Of course.

Tom. Just because some front bench prick like Abrahams kicks up a stink, we can't-

Network. Wonderful. You're just wonderful at talking. But can I ask. Do you admire plants, Mr Mitchell?

Tom. Plants.

Network. Yes, have you heard of them?

Tom. Have I heard of plants?

Network. I admire them. I admire ferns. Succulents. In fact I like many different types of plant. They brighten a room don't they?

Tom.

Network. I love the way they grow. Your ideas are good Tom. But they are, what shall I say, immature. Seeds. You understand. Seeds. The natural world is a beautiful thing don't you think?

Network presses a buzzer. Talks.

Network. He's in here.

Tom. Sir I don't think you should-

MARTY BURSTS INTO THE ROOM. She is wearing a mask that in some way echoes what the Network Head is wearing.

Marty. There are things on this station that are beyond your comprehension, Mr Mitchell. A greater purpose to everything we do. Think of me as God, Mr Mitchell, and take it as an article of faith that you do not question your God. You have been struck by a fierce bolt of lightning, and there is now nothing left of you. You are a pile of lightly

electrified dust. We do not employ dust. You. Are. F-

Network. No.

Marty takes off her mask, disappointed.

Network. We will retain his employment in research and copy. If we fire him outright it will appear as if we're bowing to political pressure.

Marty. But

Network. But yes, Marty you're right, we can't have him on air.

Marty. Very good sir.

Tom. Sir please don't-

Network. Think of it as an opportunity, Tom, an opportunity to grow.

Scene 8.

INT. Stairwell, UBS. Day.

Tom walks down, Aidie is waiting.

Aidie. How'd you go?

Tom.

Aidie. Bugger.

Tom. Abrahams will be happy.

Aidie. They keep you on in research?

Tom. Yeah.

Aidie. That's the least I'd have done.

Tom. You'd have fired me?

Aidie. To save face, yeah. Lucky it wasn't up to me.

Tom. Harsh.

Aidie. I wouldn't have liked doing it.

Tom. Thanks.

Aidie. You can't blame them really, we die on our reputation as independent news. If you're in court shitting on Abrahams. How are we meant to-

Tom. That's what they said.

Aidie. I mean you must have-

Tom.

Aidie. You must have known that.

Tom. When? What?

Aidie. On Q and A, you must have known that what you were saying wasn't going to play

well.

Tom. It did play well.

Aidie. With the viewers yeah.

Tom. What else matters?

Aidie. Yeah but “let the calamity come”, it’s still not the most even handed thing to-

Tom. The viewers thought it was.

Aidie. I mean, they’re not always the best barometer of /what’s fair

Tom. I wasn’t trying to be fair I was being honest. /They liked what I said.

Aidie. No, I mean, sure, but journalism has to stay separate right? Otherwise we’re just propaganda /for a particular view.

Tom. What if we’re right? Why not propagate it?

Aidie. But we can’t take sides.

Tom. Why not? If we’re right why can’t we? Someone’s got to tell the people out there what to /think.

Aidie. Bullshit. /That’s-

Tom. Not what to think exactly but, someone’s got to channel their energy, /their dissatisfaction-

Aidie. That’s elitist bullshit, you /can’t actually-

Tom. People are pissed off and no ones speaking for them.

Aidie. And you think you’ve got the answers?

Tom. Maybe.

Aidie.

Tom. I don’t know.

Aidie. I don’t think you really think what you’re saying.

Tom. Maybe not.

Aidie. I think if you did think that, you wouldn't really be who I think you are.

Tom. Who do you think I am?

Aidie. You're an arrogant little prick, but you're also honest, and I think you care about the world too much to buy into that tea party voice of the people shit.

Tom. I meant what I said on Q and A.

Aidie. I know.

Tom. It'd work.

Aidie. I don't know if it would or if it wouldn't, but I think it comes from a good place.

Tom. You know, you act all cynical but you're a softy.

Aidie. Oh really.

Tom. Yeah, really.

Aidie. Watch out, I'm still your boss.

Tom. Yes sir.

Aidie. Prick.

A pause.

Tom. Thanks for believing in me.

Aidie. Just do your job, keep your head down. Who knows?

Tom. Thanks.

A pause.

Aidie. I better-

Tom. Yeah.

Aidie.

Tom.

Aidie. Go. So-

Tom. Fuck I like really- and I don't want this to be-

Aidie. Ok.

Tom. I mean I like really-

Aidie. Yep?

Tom. So maybe, I have the afternoon off now-

Aidie. Oh.

Tom. You're like the most, most wonderful person I- Wonderful sounds- You're brilliant. Strong. Driven. And-

Aidie. Ok.

Tom. Ok?

Aidie. Yeah, ok.

Tom. Cool. Cos I-

Aidie. Not a museum though. I hate museums.

Tom. No. Great, Fuck museums.

Aidie. Fuck museums, exactly.

Tom. Hate them. But yeah, great!

Aidie. Don't let it go to your head.

Tom. Would I do that?

Aidie. I like beer, pesto and old movies.

Tom. I can work with that.

Aidie. And Tom.

Tom. Ailie.

Ailie. Don't make me regret this.

They kiss, maybe.

Scene 9.

Title: One year later.

INT. UBS 5th floor, Offices. Day.

Alison. Weiner, Tom Weiner Mitchell?

Tom. Alison.

Alison. Nice office.

Tom. You like?

Alison. What is that smell?

Tom. So you've obviously heard that Aidie's given me the Abrahams stuff.

Alison. Talking points.

Tom. Numerous. Too numerous. Because, when you're me, when you research like I do, when you dig like I dig, when you drill down to the deep deep detail like I do-

Alison. No drilling, isn't that the point?

Tom. Yes they seem to think that's pretty bad. Do you have kids?

Alison. Ew.

Tom. Well that's alright then.

Alison. I'll need all of it by tonight. Ten pages on the background of the reforms and the key players, industry perspective, history. The lot, /really everything you have.

Tom. What? Why? Why would I-

Alison. The deep drilled fracked up stuff too, that /sounds good.

Tom. Why would I do that before I've had a chance to pitch a package to/ Marty at least.

Alison. Because I'm telling you to.

Tom. This is /my story.

Alison. Abrahams is on tonight. Abrahams. Is on. Tonight.

Pause.

Alison. We got the call from his aides this morning. We got him.

Tom. Fantastic.

Alison. That's right it is really really awesome awesome news, isn't it?

Tom. And you need my stuff why?

Alison. I'm going to grill him like a ham and cheese sandwich at seven thirty.

Tom. Ah.

Alison. So now you see.

Tom. That's great.

Alison. I know it's great Tom, I organized it. So I know it's great.

Tom. And so you know you've got to take it to him. Be brutal.

Alison. I know how to interview.

Tom. Just don't let him get away with it again.

Alison. Oh just fuck off Tom.

Tom. What?

Alison. Get me that stuff by 3 at the latest. Don't be such a little cunt.

She leaves.

INT. 5th Floor, UBS, Hallway and Elevators.

Tom. Graham.

Graham. Wassup matey.

Tom. Can I get a skim flat white and a muffin.

Graham. Place downstairs or across the street?

Tom. I don't give a fuck Graham just do you fucking job, don't ask me this bullshit, show some fucking initiative for fuck's sake. Jesus.

Graham. No worries.

He leaves. Tom storms into-

INT. 5th Floor UBS, Aidie's Office. Day.

Tom. Why is fucking Alison doing the interview with Abrahams tonight, it doesn't have to be me, I'm not saying it has to be me, although it should be me considering I'm the most- it doesn't have to be me but Alison? Jesus Christ. She's not a shark! You need a shark out there because you have a fucking eel to catch, so you can't send her out there to catch that eel, because she's not one. A shark. Are you listening to me? Because he's //slippery

Aidie. //Slippery yes fine. Alison is doing the interview.

Tom. Why?

Aidie. A woman's touch.

Tom. It's Abrahams, Aidie.

Aidie. I am aware /of that.

Tom. She hand feeds these guys questions she knows they can answer.

Aidie. She's smooth and thorough.

Tom. It's boring TV.

Aidie. Sometime boring is informative Tom. Get your notes to her.

Tom. What about a little favouritism once in a while? Aren't I a good boyfriend?

Aidie. You're wonderful but you're not doing the interview.

Tom. I've got someone who says he's fucking his junior staffer.

Aidie. No you don't.

Tom. I do, on the record. Copies of text messages. Pictures. Fluffy handcuffs and the whole shebang.

Aidie. The fact that you have a personal vendetta against the man doesn't /weigh into your thinking at all?

Tom. He had me sued in court, I was only telling people to sit around on their arses.

Aidie. Tom.

Tom. Christ an elected representative is betraying his sacred vows, doesn't that tell us what kind of man he is?

Aidie. Who's your source?

Tom. Come on.

Aidie. Is it on the record or not?

Tom. They want to be kept anonymous but it's real. I promise.

Aidie. Why didn't you tell me sooner?

Tom. We didn't have an interview with the prick on tonight's show then.

Aidie. It doesn't matter. I still hold onto the sincere belief that there is absolutely no public benefit to uncovering the sordid details of people's personal lives. You said that about Wendy Thrace a year ago.

Tom. Yes but-

Aidie. What?

Tom. It's a man. He's fucking a man.

Aidie.

Tom.

Aidie. I wish you hadn't said that.

Tom. You don't seem happy.

Aidie. I'm going to have to tell Marty that now.

Tom. And?

Aidie. Alison is still doing the interview.

Tom. This is bullshit.

Aidie. Get your material to her.

Tom. Fuck Alison.

Aidie. Cheer up, you've got the lead.

Tom. People only care about the journalist with the face.

Aidie. And yours is so pretty, it's a tragedy.

Tom runs out of the office into-

INT 5th Floor UBS, Hallway and Elevators. Day.

Graham. They only had the chocolate one sorry.

Tom. This better not be bullshit.

Graham. It's not.

Tom. Are you sure? Because it's all happening now.

Graham. I worked for him as a clerk last year before I got this job. He got my number. He texted me again and again. He was powerful, I liked that. It was a few times. You've seen the photo. You've seen the fucking texts Tom what do you want?

Tom. He's on tonight. Alison is doing the fucking interview.

Graham. You said you'd do it as a piece. I work here don't bring him here.

Tom. Things changed.

Graham. Cancel it.

Tom. We can't cancel it man what's wrong with you?

Graham. He knows me, he'll see me.

Tom. Go home sick.

Graham. They'll know, they'll all figure it out.

Tom. No they won't.

Graham. They're fucking journos, you think they can't connect that on the night we out Simon Abrahams in our office, the one gay bloke in the office who used to work for the prick is suspiciously absent. Cancel it.

Tom.

Graham. I'll rescind everything I said. I'll say you made it up. This is my life. This is my real fucking life.

Tom. Ok. Ok. Hang on. Calm down, calm your farm. Ok. What if? What if we get you on. We reveal you. We talk to Aidie. We say. We say. Graham is the source. He's willing to speak. He's willing to speak tonight. Directly to him. He's ready to say, live on air, that Simon Abrahams pursued him inappropriately at work and that they had a love affair which ended in him being fired from his position as a clerk. You accuse him to his fucking face.

Graham. I don't want that.

Tom. Anonymity only lasts so long anyway. You think you'll get fired?

Graham. Yes. That and the crippling shame and persecution that comes with being gay and on TV.

Tom. You're in the right Graham. Jesus, Abrahams is the one who should be made to feel ashamed. Grow some balls.

Graham. I have balls Tom. And my balls happen to be on the fucking line. You understand. It is my balls, not yours, that are at risk here. I will not, I repeat, not appear on any show tonight, and I do not, I repeat, not give you permission to put my name forward. Do you understand? It might not look like it, but I want to be a journalist ok? Not a fucking story.

Tom. Ok. Yes. Ok. You're right. I'm sorry. Thanks for these. I, we'll figure something out.

Tom runs out, back into-

INT. 5th Floor UBS, Aidie's Office. Day.

Aidie. My decision is final.

Tom. You want to know the source.

Aidie. Please.

Tom. Get Marty. Skim flat?

Aidie. Lifesaver.

Tom. And they only had the chocolate one sorry.

Aidie. Chocolate's fine.

Marty comes in.

Marty. Tom. Well done, well done, well done. There's nothing better than a poofter in office.

Tom. It gets better.

Aidie. He's telling us the source.

Tom. He's willing to reveal himself.

Marty. Wonderful.

Tom. He's willing to do it live on air. Tonight, during the interview. He's willing to do that for us.

Marty. Wonderful, wonderful.

Tom. As long as I'm doing the interview.

Aidie. Tom.

Tom. I do the interview or he walks.

Marty. I don't take kindly to ultimatums.

Tom. It's not personal. It's TV. It's good TV, amazing, compelling, truthful TV. With me doing the interview.

Marty. Who's the source.

Tom. Am I doing it?

Pause.

Aidie. Yes, you can do it.

Tom. Awesome.

Marty. So who is it?

Tom. Graham.

Marty. Graham.

Aidie. Skim flat white and a muffin Graham?

Tom. That Graham.

Marty. Get Alison.

Tom. No please, allow me.

He rushes out into

INT. UBS 5th floor, Offices. Day.

Tom. Alison!

Alison. Tom I hate you but you've done excellent excellent work on this, I've just heard.

Tom. Actually I'll be needing any material you have.

Alison. Pardon Moi?

Tom. Just talked to Marty. It's me.

Alison. What are you talking about?

Tom. A man's steady hand is needed to guide this ship.

Aidie and Marty enter.

Aidie. Tom, hold on.

Alison. What is going on? Am I doing it or not?

Tom. You are not.

Alison. You're a fucking snake dog worm rat bastard of a cunt Tom and your desk smells like week old prawn shells.

Tom. Smells more like victory to me.

Aidie. Alison that's not what we said.

Tom. What?

Marty. You will be doing the interview Alison. Don't worry.

Tom. What the fuck?

Marty. You'll both be doing the interview.

Alison. //Oh that's fantastic.

Tom. //No, no that's not what we agreed, it's me. It's me or nothing, that was the deal. I can walk out of here. I will!

Aidie. Let's ask Graham shall we. Has anyone seen Graham?

Director. He's getting me a chai.

Graham enters.

Aidie. First off. Let me say that what you are doing is the bravest, most incredible thing I think I've ever heard of. Thank you, thank you so much for trusting us with this. I didn't think you had it in you.

Tom. It shows real balls.

Graham. I'm not sure what he's told you but- well look-

Alison. What's your issue with me Graham, I've always liked you, you remember my

orders.

Graham. What?

Alison. You've got something against me.

Graham. Not at all. I-

Marty. Graham listen. You're a brave man, and let me tell you there is room on this station for brave people. I can see how something like this, this experience, might transition you into a permanent position here. But. Tom AND Alison are going to do the interview. Take it or leave it.

Tom. You're a journalist. What would a journalist do?

Graham. Yes, if that's what you think, Tom and Alison will be fine.

Marty. Get him to make-up.

Marty and Graham leave.

Alison. Stick to the script weiner.

Tom. Absolutely.

Alison leaves.

Aidie.

Tom. What?

Aidie. We play it clean, ok? Stick to the script.

Tom. You're taking Alison's side?

Aidie. It's two people's lives.

Tom. It's sex. It leads.

Aidie. What are you doing this for? You're meant to be the idealistic one. I'm the hard-ass opportunist.

Tom. We gotta give them a show, don't we?

Aidie. Don't.

Tom. What?

Aidie. I don't want to hear any of that philosophical do nothing bullshit /up there, ok?

Tom. Bullshit, wow, ok.

Aidie. You know what I mean.

Tom. It's a legitimate strategy /of resistance!

Aidie. Get him with the facts. Don't make it all-

Tom. What, honest? Don't make it reflect my personal politics at all? Really? Fuck, what did you hire me for?

Aidie. Your pretty face.

Tom. Thanks.

Aidie. Get him with the facts. You can get him, but it has to be with the facts.

A pause. Tom nods. Aidie leaves.

Tom. Showtime.

Scene 10.

INT. UBS Studio Set. Night.

Off air.

The space is set up for a Current Affair style interview. Three chairs, tightly lit. A simple two-shot on the cameras. Techies are finishing setting up the space as Abrahams, Alison and Aidie enter.

Aidie. Is your lapel mic working?

Abrahams. Seems fine. Can you hear me? Check. Check. One. Two.

Aidie. Yep.

Alison. Don't worry Simon this will be a run of the mill interview.

Tom rushes in.

Tom. Sorry I'm late. Nervous poo.

Abrahams. What's he doing here then?

Alison. Just try to ignore him.

Tom. I've missed this.

Alison. No ones missed you.

Tom. We'll see. Righto, stick to the script people, let's do this.

Director. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6

Abrahams. Into the fray once more we go.

Director. 5, 4, (3, 2, 1)

On air.

Alison. Thanks for joining us on UBS news, I'm Alison Richards.

Tom. And I'm Tom William Mitchell

Alison. Our guest tonight is Simon Abrahams, minister for the environment and social services. Minister thanks for joining us.

Abrahams. Pleasure to be here, Alison.

Alison. Minister, the reforms package your government is trying to pass, has been described variously as fundamentalist, dangerous and visionary. How would you describe the proposed changes to industry's right to drill, excavate and export.

Abrahams. Thanks for this question. Important question. Vital. Now, I would describe these changes as, first and foremost, necessary.

Alison. Necessary in what way?

Abrahams. In the way that the word implies Alison. These measures ensure Australia's prosperity for the years to come. It makes Australia's export competitive for international investment as well as instilling confidence in business here at home.

Alison. The potential environmental impact doesn't weigh on your mind in regards to these changes?

Abrahams. Now I want to get one thing clear, a climate denier is not what I am Alison.

Alison. You have said in the past that "climate change is nothing more than a conspiracy of the green left to advance their big government agenda."

Abrahams. Well my views on this are clear. But I am not, and have never been, a climate denier. I acknowledge there have been changes to our, our uh, climate, but the extent to which this is, uh, caused by human beings is of course, a matter of scientific debate.

Alison. 97 percent of scientists agree on the reality of human contribution to climate change Minister.

Abrahams. As a journalist Alison, you should be more aware than anyone to the importance of looking at the motivations behind these studies, the vested interests many have in this field.

Graham appears out of shot, wearing a suit, preparing to enter.

Abrahams. The important thing is that our government is doing the right thing for this country.

Alison. The right things. The right thing is something you, Minister, might be trying to do in parliament, but what about in your personal life.

Abrahams. I'm not sure what you're-

Alison. Do you always do the right thing in your personal life Minister?

Abrahams. I have a feeling I'm about to be ambushed.

Alison. You might be very perceptive in this, Minister, because UBS news can now reveal-

Tom. Hang on a minute there, Alison. Personally I'd just like to congratulate Simon on the package he's presenting to us.

Alison. Tom I think we should-

Tom. No, really. I love this bill and I fully support it. It's fantastic.

Abrahams. Well, thank you.

Tom. You have my vote.

Abrahams. I'm waiting for the sting in the tail here.

Tom. None's coming. The bill's a good one. I can rise above our vendetta to see what this country needs. It's you Simon.

Aidie has walked out into the studio and is making shift the convo gestures.

Alison. UBS news can now reveal-

Tom. Alison come on we're here to debate the facts.

Abrahams. Yeah.

Tom. We're here to discuss the merits of this opportunity package, aren't we?

Abrahams. Exactly.

Tom. Give him a chance to make his case.

Alison. Aidie, are you going to step in here?

Aidie is gesturing frantically. Tom sees it but shrugs it off.

Tom. I'm not sure what that means, sorry.

Abrahams. Are there any actual questions coming my way anytime soon?

Tom. Of course, Simon, I'm sorry let me check my notes.

Graham. Should I come on?

Aidie. Graham wait-

Graham. Should I come one?

Abrahams. I don't have to stay here for this.

Alison. I'm going to murder you.

Tom. Good luck.

Graham. I'm coming on.

Aidie. Wait.

All at once, Chaos. Tom is having the time of his life, he gestures to the cameras for them to get particular shots.

Graham. // I AM A REAL HUMAN BEING WITH DIGNITY. THIS IS THE ONLY PACKAGE HE CARES ABOUT. THIS IS THE REAL DRILL! ISN'T IT SIMON, THE PUBLIC HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW. THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL SIMON AND YOU'VE CROSSED THE LINE AGAIN AND AGAIN. I'M A REAL HUMAN BEING WITH DIGNITY. WHO'S PENIS IS THIS THEN? WHO'S PENIS IS THIS THEN SIMON, HUH? WHO'S IS IT BECAUSE IT AIN'T MINE BECAUSE I'M CIRCUMCISED LIKE A MOTHERFUCKER!

PR officer. //THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEBATE THE ISSUES BUT I'M AFRAID MINISTER ABRAHAMS IS INDISPOSED PRESENTLY AND WON'T BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO YOUR QUESTIONS. THE PENIS IN QUESTION IS UNIDENTIFIED AT THIS STAGE, IT COULD BE ANYONE'S. IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE SIMON'S AT ALL.

Alison. //I'M SORRY LADIES AND GENTLEMEN IT SEEMS AS IF A REGULAR SHOW JUST ISN'T ON THE CARDS TONIGHT. WE WILL BE RETURNING TO OUR SCHEDULED,

PROFESSIONAL, PLANNED, SCRIPTED AND WELL-THOUGHT OUT PROGRAM AS SOON AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE AND ONCE WE KICK MR MITCHELL OUT ON HIS BEHIND FOR BEING SUCH A RIDICULOUS SHOW PONY. A SHOW BOAT TOO, A SHOW BIZ WANNABE TRY-HARD. HE'S NOT MEANT TO EVEN BE ON THIS SHOW! EFF YOURSELF TOM!

Abrahams. //OH MATE, YOU HAVE BEEN FED THE MOST STINKING RUBBISH. WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL, GREEN WEEKLY'S ACADEMY FOR ADVANCED IDIOTS HIGH? RIGHTO, RIGHTO, THIS IS ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE, GRAHAM, I CANNOT COMMENT ON MATTERS THAT DO NOT- YEAH FINE, UP YOURS TOO MATE. UP YOURS WITH A DONKEYS. I HAVE NO IDEA WHO'S PENIS THAT IS. NOT MINE. WELL IT'S NOT MINE. EXACTLY, THE INTERNET AND SUCH THINGS. IT IS A FABRICATED PENIS!

Director. // YOU FUCKING MORON. YOU WANT US TO LOSE OUR FUCKING JOBS? EVERY FUCKING TIME SHE PUTS YOU IN FRONT OF THIS THING YOU FUCK IT UP FOR EVERYONE. THIS CUNT DESERVES WHAT HE GETS. OH. OH YEAH, I MEAN YOU MATE. YOU FUCKING YUPPY BOY. YOU FUCKING SNAKE. ARE YOU GOING TO LET THIS KEEP GOING ARE YOU, AIDIE? YOU'RE HAPPY THE WAY THIS IS GOING? JESUS. I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THAT JOB ON MASTERCHEF.

The commotion continues. Turning into a bit of a fight/struggle between Simon Abrahams and Graham over the phone until Abrahams whacks Graham in the face, hard. Graham collapses. Abrahams stands over him, his face caught in close up.

The room is silent.

Tom starts to clap.

Tom. Simon Abrahams everybody.

The screens snap off.

Tom stops clapping. Abrahams realizes what's happened.

Abrahams. Shit. Oh shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Oh shit. Oh my god. Fuck. Shit. No. Shit. Shit. Fucking. I'm so. Shit, I'm so sorry. Fuck. Fucking hell. God. God. God. God. No. No.

Abrahams looks at Tom.

Tom. There's the sting in the tail.

Scene 11.

INT. POSH BAR. Night.

Loud music. Dancing. Tom is talking to the bar staff. Elsewhere, a group is gossiping.

Tom. Did you see his face? Right before he hit Graham. Crack. Fuck, it almost made me pity the bastard.

Fan 2. Is that Tom?

Fan 1. Defs is.

Fan 3. I fucking love this bar.

Tom. Another!

Fan 1. I reckon he's a shoe in for a logie.

Fan 2. Best newcomer I reckon.

Fan 1. Is that the gold one or the-

Fan 3. It's silver.

Tom. I don't know, something flaming, some shit that's on fire.

Fan 2. I'm gonna get a photo.

Fan 1. You'll get us kicked out!

Fan 3. He won't care, look he's fucking blind.

Fan 2. I'm doing it.

Tom. There's the sting in the tail you fucking prick.

Fan 2. Tom,

Tom. Hi.

Fan 1.// Hi

Fan 3.//Hi

Tom. Hello

Fan 2. Can I get-

Tom. Sure. Sure. Give the people what they want right?

They take a snap.

Fan 2. Are you here with Wendy?

Tom. What?

Fan 2. With Wendy? She's here somewhere. I just thought-

Tom. Wendy Thrace, really?

Fan 1. You'd make a great couple.

Tom. No, actually I'm-

Fan 3. Do you like, script your speeches?

Fan 1. Shut up!

Fan 3. I'm trying to get into screenwriting and I'd love your notes.

Tom. I just say whatever I wanna say man.

Fan 3. Impro, got it.

Fan 2. One more for luck?

Tom. Go for it.

Another snap.

Tom gets a phone call. It's Ailie. Split focus.

Ailie. Where are you?

Tom. Somewhere. Out. I'm ok!

Aidie. You could have text me. You disappeared after the show.

Tom. Yeah sorry um-

Fan 1. Is that your wife?

Fan 2. Is he married?

Fan 3. No ring.

Tom. We're celebrating.

Fan 1. Or is it your like, mum or something?

They laugh.

Aidie. So I can hear.

Tom breaks away from the fans.

Tom. Sorry.

Aidie. Are you coming home?

Tom. Course. Soon, just have to- I'll call you when I'm in the uber.

Aidie. I'll be asleep.

Tom. Sure. Then. See you when I-

Aidie. Yeah.

She hangs up.

Fan 2. Look there she is.

Wendy Thrace has walked into the main room.

Wendy. My publicist said you were here.

Tom. And here I am.

Wendy. Cool.

Tom. Cool.

Wendy. Cool.

Scene 12.

INT. Tom and Addie's apartment. Night.

Tom stumbles in. Addie is waiting.

Tom. You're still up.

Addie.

Tom. I'm glad.

Addie. What the fuck Tom.

Tom. What?

Addie. What the fuck.

Tom. Sorry I just got caught up with-

Addie. No, Abrahams.

Tom. Right. How amazing was that?

Addie. Amazing?

Tom. Please tell me you got the bit where he clocked Graham.

Addie. I told you to stick to the script.

Tom. Yeah you told me to "stick to the script".

Addie. Don't do that.

Tom. I'm not-

Addie. Don't do that. You know.

Tom.

Addie. Why are you agreeing with him?

Tom. I like the bill.

Aidie. A bill that'll tear up the reef? That'll spew out more fucking carbon into the-

Tom. Absolutely.

Aidie. Why?

Tom. We need bills like that to pass before anything real happens.

Aidie. Fucking hell.

Tom. The revolution! It'll happen a lot quicker with dudes like him in office.

Aidie. Like he could run now.

Tom. I couldn't resist.

Aidie. Are you really going to vote for them?

Tom. You think the other mob are any better?

Aidie. No, but, fuck. We have to reject, don't we, we have to reject the headlong, fucking suicidal, nosedive they're sending the planet into.

Tom. What good does that do?

Aidie. What good does whatever you're doing do?

Tom. It hastens the coming change.

Aidie. But how can you-

Tom. I have my politics, ok? It doesn't have to have anything to do with us.

Aidie.

Tom. You know how I feel about you.

Aidie.

Tom. I mean it Aidie. Everything I say, everything I do, I mean. I live it. You know that about me.

Aidie. It doesn't mean you have to-

Tom. They want me to. Don't you see that?

Aidie. Who?

Tom. Check your phone. Google me. Go on. Google me last hour.

Aidie. I don't need to-

Tom. That's why I do it.

Aidie. Stop interrupting me.

Tom. Ok but-

Aidie. Don't interrupt me.

Tom. Sorry I'm. I'm drunk and, this argument-I want to be with you, I don't want to fight.

Aidie. Neither do I. But you're pushing me ok? You're pushing me.

Tom.

Aidie. I'm going to bed.

Tom. See you at work, then.

Aidie leaves the room.

Tom. Fuck.

Scene 13.

INT. UBS studio offices. Day.

Tom has a big bunch of flowers. Network appears.

Network. Tom.

Tom. Sir. Sorry I'm.

Network. Are you alright?

Tom. I'm waiting for Aidie, we. We had a bit of a fight so.

Network. Walk with me.

Tom. Sir I better-

Network. Never mind that now. Put these on. I have something to show you.

They put on sunglasses.

INT. Heart of the UBS Building.

Title. Time Stops.

We are in a huge cavernous room. Tom drops the flowers to the floor.

Tom. Oh my god.

Network. I remember feeling what you're feeling. The first time my father showed me this. I felt the presence of something true, something far far bigger than me, bigger than anything I could have imagined. And beautiful as the sun.

Tom. What is it?

Network. It's the market Tom.

Tom. The market.

Network. That's right.

Tom. It. That doesn't make any sense.

Network. Doesn't it? Can't you feel it? What does your heart say?

Tom. Can this be the market?

Network. It has always been here. In this building. They found it in 1760 when they were laying the foundations. They built this room to house it, to keep it at optimal temperature. Not many have seen what you're seeing. Look at it. The movement of it. The spread of it. When it flickers. See. When it flickers, a billion dollars is made somewhere. Can you hear that?

Tom. It sounds like birds.

Network. Yes. Like seagulls. That is the sound of the market.

Tom. I can't look at all of it at once. It keeps changing.

Network. It is the engine of the world Tom. It will last forever.

Tom. What are those dark spots?

Network. That large one is North Korea. That one is Iceland. They are refusing to let the market take its course. But see. Even in the black.

Tom. Threads of light.

Network. The market is everywhere. It is in a North Korean soldier trading cigarettes for extra food from a comrade. Do you see that bright area? The one that burns hottest?

Tom. Yes.

Network. That is Africa. When I was young I remember that spot was barely glowing. Do you see the circling shapes at the apex? Almost pink. That is the sale of meat. And there, those dissolving verticals below it, that is oil. And at the centre, the spider web that reaches out to every corner of the market. Touching everywhere.

Tom. Television.

Network. Yes Tom. That is television.

Tom. Why are you showing me this?

Network. I want you to do something for me.

Tom. Of course.

Network. Feed it.

Tom. How?

Network. Just keep doing what you're doing. Keep doing what you're doing.

The market.

Network. You see. From the very beginning of time there has been a natural order to things, a natural way of conducting and organising life on this planet. The market is a part of this. It is what allows us to value things, to love things, to equate things to other things. Once that was seeds and grain traded for woven pieces of fabric, or in the animal kingdom, think of fancy feathered birds with their blue dancing rituals trying to attract a mate. What is a bowerbirds nest but a way of paying for sex with art? The market has always been a part of this celestial body called earth even before we as homo sapiens sapiens came to be upon it. It has always been the force that holds all life in balance. The problem with human beings, as opposed to bowerbirds who are carrying on much the same as they always have been, is that we are constantly evolving. We learn, Tom, we grow, our brains grow. A terrible blessing and a curse all in one. For while our thoughts do make new modes and avenues for the market to utilise, so too do human beings, in their mad sad rush towards death, attempt to find ways to negate the market. The communists. The agrarianists. The ethical coffee. The hacktivists spreading lies online. This upsets the market. It disturbs the natural order. It threatens the balance of all life. It is pollution. Think of the market like the atmosphere. In fact we can be more literal here, the market IS the atmosphere in a very real sense. And these disturbances try to erode it, to punch holes in it. And it is through our own negligence that this is happening. We are not helping the market enough. We always want to contain it. To fix it. A little tax here. A government owned industry there. A small wage for those who are unwealthy. These things must be eliminated. Must we sit idly by while the very atmosphere we breathe is under attack? No. No we mustn't. We must fight. But we must fight using the language of the day. We must speak to the people in a voice that does not alienate but coerces. A voice that the people believe in. Tom. Reach out with your hands and touch it.

Tom. Won't that hurt it?

Network. No, silly. It wants to be touched by those who love it. As we all do.

Tom. I have doubts. I have fair trade coffee at home.

Network. Faith always requires a leap Tom.

Tom. I'm scared.

Network. Don't be. All your life you've felt you were destined for something.

Tom. Destined.

Network. Destined to make a difference. A wielder of opinion. An inspiration to millions.
Destined for television.

Tom touches the market.

Scene 14.

INT. UBS Studio Set. Day.

We can see Alison on the screens. But we are focused on the control room.

Stage manager. 10, 9,

Aidie. The next clip is short, just be aware.

Director. Thanks

Stage manager. 8, 7

Aidie. Who did this animation? It's nice.

Stage manager. 6, 5, 4

Aidie. Flash out of camera 3 after this and then mix into camera 2. Standby.

Stage Manager. 3, 2, 1

Aidie. Did someone just put something in there? Guys we've got two channels of fed pulse in there now. We'll have to do a channel sort in a minute.

Director. Yep.

Stage Manager. 10, 9, 8

Aidie. Flash out of camera 3 next. Then camera 2, camera 2 follow her when she walks.

Director. Follow you said?

Stage manager. 7, 6, 5

Aidie. She's bought new shoes.

Stage Manager. 4, 3

Director. Camera 2 follow.

Aidie. Standby.

Stage Manager. 2, 1

Tom and the Network have entered.

Tom. I never get to see you like this.

Aidie. Tom.

Tom. I'm always on the other side.

Aidie. Tom, I'm working.

Tom. I want you to let me go on the air.

Aidie. What?

Tom. I have to go on the air now.

Aidie. We're doing the news Tom, I can't just-

Tom. You were right,

Aidie. Jim take over for a sec. What's going on?

Tom. I'm so sorry about last night, about Abrahams. I should have listened.

Aidie. Yes you should have but why-

Tom. I just found out something incredible. It's very important that /you let me on.

Aidie. Tom what is this? Are you ok?

Tom. Something completely incredible. You know me. You know what I'm like. Have my instincts ever been wrong on this stuff?

Aidie. This is insane.

Tom. It is insane. It is insane. I know. But you have to let me walk out there now, say what I have to say, then go.

Aidie. I can't.

Tom. You can. Please. It's the story Aidie. It's the story.

A pause.

Aidie. Are you sure?

Tom. I know it is. I knew it as soon as I saw it. It's the story and we have to do it now. You and me. We have to do this.

Aidie looks to the Network. The network nods.

Aidie. 30 seconds after the next ad break.

Tom rushes out.

Aidie. Alison, the next lead in is for Tom ok? Yes I know. Say following the dramatic events of last night's interview, Tom is here to discuss his thoughts. Ok? See what happens. I know. Just. If he's awful just cut to the Celeb videos ok?

Network. Wonderful.

Aidie. This better be good.

On air.

Alison. After the dramatic events of last night's interview, Tom William Mitchell is here to-

Tom. I'm Tom William Mitchell and I have something earth shattering to tell you. I am in love.

Alison. What?

Tom. What do I mean when I say DO WHATEVER YOU WANT? Does it mean follow your dreams? Reach for the stars. No, It means, brutally enact your fantasies on the world. So I'm here to do exactly that.

Tom gets down on his knees.

Alison. Oh my god.

Aidie walks out onto set.

Aidie. Tom. What the fuck are you doing?

Tom. It's weird. Growing up I always wanted to fuck movie stars. Live in their mansions. Peel them grapes. Recline naked by the pool drinking Aperol Spritz. And now-

Aidie. If you think I'd say yes to this kind of cheesy on-air-

Tom. And now I will. Wendy Thrace. Marry me. Last night was the best night of my life. Marry me. And let's live together in a golden, glorious fuck fest of a future. I love you.

Aidie. Cut

Tom. If we want the world to change we have to be selfish.

Aidie. Cut.

Tom. A free world. Wendy.

Aidie. Cut him. Cut. Commercial

Network. No.

Aidie. What?

Network. No.

Tom. Wendy I'll be here til you answer.

Director. What should I-

Network. Alison. Cover.

Alison. No fucking way-

Network. Alison.

Alison. Well, this was all a bit of surprise but. I have to say that was a pretty lovely speech. I wonder if she heard.

Aidie. Commercial.

Network. No. Graham.

Graham. I don't know. Can we, Can we get someone on that? Can we get someone on that. If she was to come. Imagine.

Aidie. I'll rip the fucking power out then.

Network. Stop her.

Tom grabs a camera and films Aidie.

Tom. This is Aidie. She is one of the most wonderful people I know. She's brilliant. Strong. Driven. Her imagination and her bravery is what started me on this path.

Network. Graham.

Graham. That's true. She was the first to give him a position in Television

Network. Alison.

Alison. I believe they also may have been lovers.

Aidie. Get off my air.

Tom. Ah but it isn't your air, it belongs to everyone.

Network. Keep going.

Graham. I'm being told Wendy Thrace is on her way.

Alison. Oh my god.

Graham. She's on her way from downtown and will be here any minute.

Alison. All thanks to our celeb spotter app.

Graham. That's right, Alison, it's a marvelous innovation.

Tom. I don't know why you're so surprised. I told you.

Aidie. Get off my fucking air.

Tom. Everything I say, everything I do, I mean.

Aidie. Off.

Network. I believe they need you back in the control room Ms. Roberts.

Aidie. Jim can manage.

Network. Then it's time for you to leave.

Aidie. Am I being fired?

Tom. You must have seen this coming.

Alison. OH, oh. Look. She's here. She's here. She's here.

Wendy Thrace walks in. Tom passes the camera to a tech. He gets down on one knee. The camera zooms. Wendy looks directly into the camera.

Wendy. Yes. Yes, Tom of course I'll marry you.

They embrace making THE media moment of 2015. The camera zooms in on Aidie.

Aidie. Tom William Mitchell. A name you can trust.

Scene 15.

INT. Museum. Day.

Aidie . A fucking museum Tom? Really?

Tom. Privacy's a little hard to come by for me these days.

Aidie. What do you want?

Tom. I won't take long.

Aidie. What do you want, Tom?

Tom. Did you really want to leave it the way we left it?

Aidie. We?

Tom. You know what I mean.

Aidie. You arrogant little dickless fuck.

Tom. It doesn't have to be like this.

Aidie. Why am I here?

Tom takes a stroll, maybe he goes to sit down at a bench thing. Aidie stays standing.

Tom. I want the announcement to be a surprise.

Aidie. What announcement?

Tom. I'm done with TV. I'm standing for parliament and I want you to run my campaign.

Aidie. Wow.

Tom. Who better to do it? You keep me honest Aids. We can make something of this country. Make it actually do something.

Aidie. Or, more precisely, do nothing.

Tom. Exactly.

Aidie. Have you thought that through? Your little idea, your little philosophy? Think

about it. If the way for the world to save itself is for everyone to do nothing until the massive revolutionary something happens, seemingly by magic, why would anyone actually take that step? Where's the motivation? Everyone's already living out their dreams. I was at home, gearing up for my weekly dose of shame and anger with Tony Jones and there you are, preaching that I should give up my shame, give up my anger and just wait, safe in the knowledge that everything will topple eventually and a better world is on its way. Well fuck off. Fuck off. We need to do something.

Tom. This is why I need you on my team.

Aidie. The idea is psychotic.

Tom. Aids.

Aidie. You think I'd work with you again?

Tom. I'd hoped, yes.

Aidie. You got me fired, you humiliated me.

Tom. Don't make this personal.

Aidie. The best thing to happen to you would be a bullet. A bullet in your fucking head.

Scene 16.

EXT. Ethihad Arena. A huge stadium.

Abrahams. Ladies and Gentlemen. My friend. Tom William Mitchell.

Tom enters.

MASSIVE APPLAUSE.

He has a speech written down and prepared in his hands. He thinks, looking out at the crowd. He hold up his prepared script and rips it up.

Tom. Someone recently told me that doing nothing isn't enough, and as you know I'm a man who believes in the power of doing nothing, but I'm here to let you all know today that my position has changed. Something must be done. I'm here to announce my candidacy for the office of Prime Minister. My policy platform is based on one principle. How bad can it get? Think about it. If the way for the world to save itself is for everyone to do nothing until the calamity comes, why would anyone actually take that step? Where's the motivation? I will give you the push you need. Capitalism would legalise the trafficking of human organs if it could. I say lets do it. Capitalism would legalise child porn if it could. I say let's do that. Capitalism would make it a crime not to spend money. I say let's do that. Capitalism wants more prisoners, it wants more jails, let's do that. Capitalism wants us to legalise drugs. Let's do it. Gambling. Let's do it. Capitalism has no morals. It doesn't care what happens to us. So neither should we. Let's do it. I announce my intention to legalise the sale of human beings to other human beings. I announce my intention to sell off schools, hospitals, infrastructure to anyone who can afford it. I announce my intention to cut off all remnants of government funding for scientific research, the poor, overseas aid and international conflicts. I announce my intention to legalise the sale of chemical weaponry. I will open our borders to anyone who wants to come. Let them come. Let a billion people come. I will dissolve every handout, every back pat, every concession and rule with a grip so fierce and merciless that I will come to represent Capitalism. I will be its avatar. Its idol. I know it will be hard. But one day, the moment will come. When we've truly seen how bad it can get. And when the moment comes. I want someone to put a bullet through my head. And when my brains are sprayed onto the Australian flag you will know, the new world has arrived, the calamity has come. The golden future is here. I won't be there to see it. But my sacrifice will usher it in. It might take decades. It might be tomorrow. But something has to be done. Let me show you the way. Thank you.

Massive applause is even more massive.

The stage is trashed.

Scene 17.

Title: Years later.

EXT. Rubbish Tip. Day.

Two people are sifting through it.

- Oh my god nostalgia.
- What?
- This can.
- We still have Coke.
- I know but-
- We just can't afford it anymore.
- Yeah but look. 5 cents refundable in South Australia.
- Oh my god.
- The little fucking logo.
- Nostalgia
- I know!
- Did you ever do it?
- No way
- All the fucking coke I drank, shit man I could have made a mint.
- Worthless now.
- Yeah, bugger
- Bugger.
- The coming change though.
- Yeah, the coming change.

They go back to sifting through the rubbish.

- This patch is dry, man,
- Most are.
- Why do we bother?
- What else is there?
- They say there's an untapped one out in the middle of the pacific.
- Bullshit.
- It's true dude, the trash vortex. Decades. Literally decades of refuse. It's the tides, they push it all together. Anything you want. That'd be fucking living.
- Wishful thinking.
- You gotta have hope man.
- Sure.
- The coming change.
- Yep.

A third person enters. They tense. The new person does not speak.

- Hey, this is our patch ok?
- We're here first.
- Move along, man.
- Just move along.

They don't.

- Get the fuck out of here.
- We don't want any trouble
- Can you please just fuck off dude, please, please?

They don't. They get out a baseball bat.

- Fucking hell
- This is ours.
- Let's go.
- Fuck that.
- We should go.
- Fuck that. Fuck you. This isn't fair.
- Graham.
- Why should you have it when we have nothing? This isn't fucking fair.

The figure raises the bat.

- This isn't fucking fair.

Scene 18

INT. Dining Hall, Queen Analeese Cruise Ship, Night.

Wendy is drunk.

Wendy. Waiter!

Tom. More?

Wendy Thrace. Yes more.

Tom. Are you sure you should be-

Wendy. Where's that fucking waiter?

Tom. Darling I'm not sure if-

Wendy. JOHNNY!

Johnny. Yes Mr and Mrs Prime Minister.

Wendy. Pinot.

Johnny. Very good Madam.

Wendy. And not some tiny nip this time. A fucking bowl.

Johnny. Of course.

Johnny pops off.

Tom. Darling.

Wendy. What?

Tom. Perhaps you should get some rest.

Wendy. Listen shithead. I do. Whatever. The fuck. I want.

Tom. Ha ha.

Wendy. Except I don't really, do I. Because I'm stuck in the middle of the fucking ocean, on a fucking hulking great shit heap of a cruise liner, with my fucking shit head husband, waiting for my FUCKING PINOT!

Johnny rushes back with a goblet of wine.

Johnny. Madam.

A tremor on the ship. Cutlery shivers. Johnny spills the wine.

Wendy. Great!

Johnny. I'm so sorry Mrs Prime Minister.

Tom. Perhaps it's for the best.

Wendy. The best? For the best?

Another tremor. Tom stands.

Tom. What is going on?

Johnny. Just the storm. Big waves, I'm sure.

Wendy. Sorry everyone it's just Tom over here FARTING.

Another huge tremor.

Wendy. See!

Tom. Will someone please tell me what's happening to the ship?

The Concierge comes over.

Concierge. Ladies and Gentlemen. There is no need to be alarmed. We have a small situation.

Tom. Situation?

Concierge. Nothing of grave concern I assure you, I will ask, however, for those of you who have their meals already paid for with their trip to exit to your cabins. This dining hall is, unfortunately, closed.

Wendy. Tell us what's fucking wrong, you little twerp.

Concierge. Well. We've been boarded.

Wendy Thrace starts to laugh.

Concierge. We've been boarded by what appears to be a hostile force.

Wendy. At last some drama!

Tom. Hostile force?

Concierge. Terrorists

Tom. How did they get on board?

Johnny. WE WERE ALREADY ON BOARD.

Commotion. More terrorists come in. They capture Wendy and Tom.

Tom. Now, Johnny, we don't have to do this.

PIRATE 1. Kill the cunt!

PIRATE 2. Cut his balls off!

PIRATE 3. Fucking kill the cunt and cut his balls off, great ideas.

Johnny. Should I do that, Tom, should I cut your balls off.

Tom. Let her go.

Wendy. What do you care?

Tom. You're my wife.

Wendy. You only married me for the front page of New Idea.

Tom. I loved you. Her. I love her.

PIRATE 2. Isn't it more radical, more properly revolutionary to only care about yourself?

PIRATE 1. We have a backslider in our midst.

Tom. What do you want to hear? That I'm sorry for everything I did? Don't you think I know how awful it is out there? I know. What you do not know is how awful it has been, in here.

On that last line, TOM puts his hand on his heart. ("it's been hard on me too"). Wendy laughs.

Wendy. Bullshit.

PIRATE 3. Awful? What are you talking about?

Tom. If I have been cruel I have first and foremost been cruel to myself.

PIRATE 3. You're mistaken Mr Mitchell.

PIRATE 1. We're here to pay our respects to you.

Johnny. You're a real inspiration Mr Mitchell

PIRATE 2. We're big fans. Big Big fans.

Wendy. Great!

Johnny. You're our hero. We've read everything you've ever written.

Pirate 3. The time has come, the hour is now. The circle of history is making its next revolution.

Tom. No.

Pirate 1. Yes. It is now.

TOM. No, no.

Wendy Thrace. Yes. Yes.

Tom. No the people, the people must rise as one.

Pirate 3. We represent the people.

Tom. No, only a mass action, a mass action of millions, billions, the whole planet has to act, together, that's the only way.

Pirate 3. We used to think that too.

Johnny. It's a fantasy.

PIRATE 1. In many ways, we're more Tom William Mitchell than you are sir, because we're following the logic to its completion. We're going a step beyond. The step you won't even take yourself.

The Terrorists begin to intone.

"I AM TOM WILLIAM MITCHELL" over and over. A ritual.

Johnny. We all are. You aren't anymore.

TOM gets down on his knees. Wendy is laughing her arse off. Sometimes joining in with the pirate's chants. Echoing them.

Tom. If you are truly my disciples you will listen to me. Please. Trust me, this isn't the time.

PIRATE 1. That's the thing, Tom. We're growing the project.

PIRATE 2. If we want things to really get bad, we have to destroy the man who's saying things are so bad.

PIRATE 1. That way the calamity will never come. It will be perpetual. Don't you see.

Johnny. Praise be the endless reign of darkness.

PIRATE 3. Let television broadcast the erasure of the planet.

PIRATE 1. The problem is hope. The hope for something better. But when you're gone, long before the moment of world uprising. Hope will go with you.

PIRATE 2. And free from the tyranny of hope, we'll burn out. We'll kill ourselves. That's

the ethical act of the century. If you believe in a better world, kill yourself, because it's not going to happen. That's what you mean don't you? That's the real message of your life's works. Kill yourself.

Tom. No.

PIRATE 3. Our view on your work is just as valid, if not more valid than your own. You're a bad academic if you think otherwise.

Tom. I'm a journalist. I worked in TV. There is always a wrong and a right way of reading something. There are facts.

Wendy. You haven't worked in TV for a long time. Neither have I. You'd think marrying the PM would have been good for business but the roles dried up, the phone stopped ringing, the academy snubbed me, I wish my publicist had never sent me to that fucking news studio. I wish you were dead.

Johnny. You'll get your wish.

Tom. Let her go and I'll explain. I do not accept that my life's work is a call for apathy and nihilism. I never meant anything close to that. We must hope. Even now you are hoping that threatening me will bring about something, maybe not something good, but something at least. Doesn't that tell you that your reading of me is wrong?

They appear to think. Then one of them shoots WENDY THRACE through the head.

PIRATE 3. Take him outside.

EXT. Deck of the Queen Analeese. Night.

They have bolted a plank of wood to the side of the ship.

Johnny. Walk it.

Tom. Please. Please. Don't. I-

Johnny. Help us begin the process. Do your destiny. Be yourself.

Tom starts to walk.

Johnny. Wait.

He stops right on the edge. Turning back.

Johnny. For the camera.

Johnny pulls out his Iphone, films.

Tom jumps off.

Scene 19.

INT. SBS underground radio station. Night.

Aidie is cleaning her AK47. Holly, an intern, runs in.

HOLLY. Hi, Aidie?

AIDIE. Yes, what's up - um?

HOLLY. Holly.

AIDIE. Holly yes, hi.

HOLLY. Um so this thing just came over the wire, I don't know if it's like real or-

AIDIE. Sure go ahead.

HOLLY. So it says, and I don't know if we should believe it yet, but what it says is, you know that cruise ship? The one he's always going off on?

AIDIE. The Queen Analeese.

HOLLY. Yeah so it says it's been sunk? The Mitchellites are claiming it. There's this footage.

HOLLY plays AIDIE footage of TOM walking the plank from her phone. We hear the noise of it "For the camera." AIDIE looks blank.

HOLLY. I don't know if it's faked or. I know you knew him.

AIDIE. Not really.

HOLLY. We should run it right away.

AIDIE. Does anyone else-

HOLLY. They sent it to us so no? I don't think so?

AIDIE. They sent it to /us?

HOLLY. You. You, actually they sent it just to /you

AIDIE. Me.

HOLLY. Yeah

AIDIE. Ok.

HOLLY. So do you want me to put together a package for it or?

AIDIE. No that's fine.

HOLLY. Oh, ok.

AIDIE. What?

HOLLY. No, nothing, just. Yeah, I thought - the tyrant's dead! You know. People need to know.

AIDIE. Have you ever looked at a frame? I mean a frame for a picture, an artwork.

HOLLY. Um yeah I think? In films.

AIDIE. I mean really looked at it. Seeing it for what it is.

HOLLY. Then no- probably.

AIDIE. Neither had I. Why would you? The picture is more important. The actual thing that you want to see, the flowers, or the shipwreck. But once I really looked, not at the picture, but at what was making the picture a picture. I began to understand.

HOLLY. Understand what? Like, art?

AIDIE. I always thought as a journo I was trying to get at the truth, the story, you know, content, the picture right? I wanted to make the best picture, but I was wrong, that's what I came to realise, the true message is in the frame. What you choose to frame.

HOLLY. I'm not sure I get it sorry.

AIDIE. I don't have to run it. So I won't.

Gunfire from outside the radio compound.

HOLLY. That sounded close.

AIDIE. We should move.

HOLLY. But the news. Shouldn't we-

AIDIE. No.

HOLLY. How can you be so, I don't know, staunch

AIDIE. Ha. I like that. Staunch. I do feel staunch.

AIDIE, checks her gun, snapping in a new magazine.

HOLLY. But if it's real he's gone anyway. Isn't that good? Isn't that actually like the best news we've had in a really long time? Don't people deserve to know?

More gunfire, closer. They look to the door and lift up their guns.

HOLLY. Why aren't we running it?

AIDIE. I don't want to give him the oxygen.

A huge banging at the door. They're right outside.

AIDIE. Showtime.

The door bursts open. AIDIE and HOLLY fire.

Scene 20.

EXT. The Pacific Ocean Trash Vortex. Day.

Tom is sopping wet, half naked, his leg might be broken, he drags himself through the trash. He coughs water.

A woman is standing there. He notices.

Tom. No. It's ok. It's ok. Please. Do you, do you live here. This, home? Your home? Uh. Casa? Home?

WOMAN. (*nods*)

Tom. It's nice.

WOMAN. You fell off the boat.

Tom. The boat yes. What is this place?

WOMAN. Leftovers.

Tom. Does it have an engine? Oars? We can erect a sail. We can tie string to the seagulls and steer them with chips. We'll make a chariot. A war chariot. And sail all the shit, the leftovers, the excess fucking rubbish back to land. Our stink will choke them. Our waste will poison them. We can be a plague. You and I. You've been ignored, discarded too, you miserable thing. We can be the plague that restarts the world.

WOMAN. No.

Tom. What would you know? I'm Tom William Mitchell. I'm a world leader did you know that?

WOMAN. Not miserable. I smile all the time. Tomorrow I will see the sun again. It will rise in the east, slow and big. It will change colour. And the big shadows will move. There will be wind, and the seagulls will sing. I will dive into the water. Underneath the water, very deep, all of this falls into tiny pieces. The fishbones and rubbish turn into flakes that fall and sink. It is snowing at the bottom of the ocean. I have seen it. No, I am not miserable. Tonight I have something to eat.

Tom starts to squirm away.

Tomorrow I will see the sun again.

The WOMAN takes a step towards him, Tom is still squirming. She stands above him. He stops crawling. He looks back up at her. Deadlock.

END